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Disagreeable Objects: The Sculptural Strategies of Louise Bourgeois

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Abstract

This thesis explores Louise Bourgeois' practice as a matrix of strategies, and is positioned in opposition to the psycho-biographical approach that has dominated writing about Bourgeois' art. I take Giacometti's title at its most literal: that the object may disagree with the discourse around it. Chapter one places Bourgeois in her moment of the 1940s to historicize an artist who is seen as out-of-time and to explore her early strategies. Chapter two considers Bourgeois' studio as an alternative site for meaning in her work. Her studio strategies can be seen to be at once invisible, dominated by her personality and biography and yet simultaneously central to the curatorial and commercial activities. Bourgeois' narratives, that dominate our understanding of her work, are discovered to operate mythically (Midgley). I interrogate the status of Bourgeois' words and her self-images in relation to her objects. I suggest that they exist in a complex relationship to the sculptures, slipping between context and sculptural intervention. Consequently, there are moments when it can be argued that even Bourgeois' body is a part of her work. Hence, I undermine the art-life trajectory, not by separating the artist from the work, through the expressive fallacy and the critique of authorship, but by paying close attention to the blurring between life and art. The inevitable conclusion is that, in a very real sense, the art may be producing the life. My final chapter investigates how Bourgeois' objects co-opt the audience as one's peripatesis becomes a walk into her environments and in some cases one substitutes for the sculptural symbolic object. Concluding with Bourgeois' most recent work I ask if her most well known art of recent years is best understood in terms of her aging and examine how understanding an aging subjectivity may alter our perception of Bourgeois' work.

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Introduction

Disagreeable Objects

In 1929, Michel Leiris wrote an article for the fourth issue of *Documents* entitled, 'Alberto Giacometti'. Leiris cautioned his readers: 'Don't expect me to call this sculpture, I prefer *DIVAGUER*.'[1] Meaning to move or wander, Leiris' replacement of noun with verb indicated to his readers that Giacometti's works were not static objects for him but things that *worked*: performed and acted. It is in this spirit that I chose the title Disagreeable Objects for this thesis. For not only is the performative, in the sense of Austin's speech act, relevant to Bourgeois' dramatic and confrontational practice, but I wanted to emphasize that this thesis is, above all, an engagement with objects and their making, particularly, given that Bourgeois' objects exist in a complex relation to her often repeated and over-determined statements.[2] Whilst Bourgeois' statements restrict discussion of her work solely to the personal and psychological, her sculptures can be seen to be participating in other dialogues, with modernism, with the surrealist-infatuated New York scene and, at times, with Giacometti. For instance, Bourgeois responds to Giacometti's *Disagreeable Object* of 1931, (plate 1) in her knowing and stunning (both visually and violently) *Fallen Woman* of 1981 (plate 2). There are clear links between Bourgeois and Giacometti. One might consider a shared interest in the environmental space of the object, in fetishistic objects and in Existentialism, or Bourgeois' titular borrowings such as the pole figure, or personage, *Spoon Woman* (1949-50),[3] which calls to mind Giacometti's totemic *Spoon Woman* (1926-7). It is not only Giacometti with whom Bourgeois' work might be considered to be in formal dialogue, or for Rosalind Krauss, in *informe*-al dialogue.[4] Among others, Lynn Marie Somers, in her thesis, *'Ode À Ma Mère': Louise Bourgeois, Intersubjectivity and Embodied Feminism*, positions Bourgeois as also in dialogue with Rodin and Brancusi.[5] Wayne Andersen notes the clear precedent for Bourgeois' personages set by Max Ernst's *Lunar Asparagus* of 1935 (plate 3)[6] and Anne Wagner and Thomas McEvilley each map a geographic

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[1] Michel Leiris, Alberto Giacometti, *Documents* (no. 4, p 210, 1929) quoted in Christian Klemm, *Alberto Giacometti* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Kunsthaus Zürich, 2001).

[2] Mieke Bal makes the connection to Austin in *Louise Bourgeois' Spider* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001). Mignon Nixon points to the importance of affective speech in, 'Eating Words', *Oxford Art Journal* special issue on Louise Bourgeois (vol. 22, no. 2, November 1999) pp. 55-70. Alex Potts, describes the pivotal importance of confrontation in 'Louise Bourgeois - Sculptural Confrontations' in Mignon Nixon (Ed.) *Oxford Art Journal*, same issue, pp. 37-53.

[3] This spelling is according to the Shorter Oxford dictionary, although the spelling: personnage is also commonly seen in writings on Bourgeois.

[4] R. E. Krauss, 'Louise Bourgeois: Portrait of the Artist as Fillette', In: *Bachelors* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 1999) p. 51-74.

[5] Lynn Marie Somers, *'Ode À Ma Mère': Louise Bourgeois, Intersubjectivity and Embodied Feminism*, PhD Dissertation (State University of New York at Stony Brook, 2001) chapter 1.

[6] See Wayne Andersen, *American Sculpture in Process 1930-1970* (Boston Massachusetts: New York Graphic Society, 1975) p. 94. Robert Storr repeats this comparison in *Louise Bourgeois* (Phaidon, 2003) p. 54.

and prehistoric terrain within which Bourgeois' work can be seen to be working.[7] What becomes interesting, as critical research has begun to move beyond the frame of Bourgeois' narratives, is not so much tracing Bourgeois' position in relation to these artists' movements and ideas as influences. Rather, Bourgeois' continued refusal of these sculptural relationships in her interviews and statements, not only establishes the inherent disagreeability of her work, whose forms can be seen to undermine her vocal assertions, but also begins to reveal the strategies Bourgeois uses to control criticism and to promote her practice. My first chapter argues that it is by refusing Bourgeois' personal and a-historic self-narration that one may begin to consider her as a historical figure. My later chapters go on to explore *how* Bourgeois' making strategies interact with her language strategies and further how the critical discourse that surrounds her appropriates Bourgeois' strategies to its own ends.

When I first discovered Bourgeois' work, I was astounded by the quality of certain works, but also by what I feel to be the patchiness of her output. This was something absent from the monographs and press articles on Bourgeois, where there seemed to be little engagement with the objects themselves and, more importantly, no space within the discussions to consider that a piece might fail; might not actualize space and our encounter with the work, according to its intention or its accompanying narrative. The daily papers, where opinions sell, was the only source of criticism; as Richard Dorment illustrates, writing in the Daily Telegraph about Bourgeois' towers for the Tate in 2000:

> As president of the anti-Louise Bourgeois society I can hardly bring myself to comment upon the three 30 ft high steel towers with viewing platforms that she has made for the huge turbine hall. Or the equally large steel spider, which is inevitably titled *Maman*, ("Mama"). Vacuous, overblown, self-obsessed as always, Bourgeois is the most overrated artist of our time.[8]

It is hardly a serious, level-headed engagement with the work. Similarly, Ralph Rugoff wrote in 1998,

> Louise Bourgeois is the widely revered eminence grise of contemporary art. But like the granny in *Cold Comfort Farm*, she is forever reminding us that something nasty happened in the woodshed. For more than 40 years, the New York based artist has been chatting up her miserable childhood and invoking it in visceral works that reek of sexual trauma... What haunts this show [Serpentine 1998] in the end are not ghastly memories of her unhappy youth, but the whimpering spectre of banality.[9]

Such overblown objections are not helpful. The contrast between the laudatory writing of monograph texts, which I explore below, and this vicious criticism led me to ask why the texts available to me at the time discussed her work in the terms they did. Thus, my project was born as a discovery, an investigation into the status quo. One of the motivations for my work is that I want that there to be space, theoretically, for such things as failure to be spoken, in other texts than throw away newsprint. I do not think it is appropriate to criticize Bourgeois' work in this

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[7] Thomas McEvilley 'History and Prehistory in the Work of Louise Bourgeois', in Peter Weiermair (Ed.) *Louise Bourgeois* (Frankfurt: Editions Stemmle, 1995) pp. 31-9; Anne M. Wagner, 'Bourgeois Prehistory or the Ransom of Fantasies', in *Oxford Art Journal* (vol. 22, no. 2, 1999) pp. 3-23.

[8] Richard Dorment, 'A Giant Comes to Life and a New Era Begins', *The Daily Telegraph* (Wed. May 10, 2000) pp. 26-7.

[9] Ralph Rugoff, 'Inside the past of Art's Favourite Neurotic' *The Financial Times* (November, 1998) p. 22.

thesis, but I hope that the issues explored here, of strategy, sculpture, subjectivity and age begin to open up a new space in which to discuss the sculptures of Louise Bourgeois.

The Critical Field

What follows is a short summary of the critical field as I see it at present. Primarily my thesis is concerned with prevailing framing of Bourgeois in the art press and the widely circulating published literature, through monographs and through catalogues. Emerging from academic circles and visual artists is a growing body of highly analytical work that contain important contributions that prefigure and interact with my own research. Together these two levels, the academic and the widely circulating literature, constitute a discourse in the sense that Foucault means in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, as existing independently of the statements of which it consists and operating to constitute a particular object of study, or of ideology, and defining the limits of truth and validity in that object.[10] It is the discourse on and of Louise Bourgeois, which concerns me in this project.

In 1975, Lucy Lippard wrote:

> It is difficult to find a framework vivid enough to incorporate Louise Bourgeois' sculpture. Attempts to bring a coolly evolutionary or art-historical order to her work, or to see it in the context of one art group or another, have proved more or less irrelevant. [...] Rarely has an abstract art been so directly and honestly informed by its maker's psyche.[11]

This paragraph has been frequently quoted by writers on Bourgeois, firstly to indicate that she is exceptional and goes beyond our capacity to frame and position her and her work. Further, it indicates that the art-historical and theoretical approaches one might use are irrelevant and, at the same time, Lippard frames the discourse on Bourgeois as both abstract and a direct emanation from Bourgeois' psyche. Lippard's framework is purely psychological; reducing any formal concerns merely to modes that 'can serve to define her own needs and emotions.'[12] It is a structure of personalizing and psychologizing her work (and recently also Bourgeois' narratives of her childhood) that has been widely disseminated, informing the greater body of writing on Bourgeois for many years. Lippard's dismissal of the usefulness of an art historical approach ran thus:

> While her [Bourgeois] work has formal affinities with that of artists as diverse as Miró, Kiesler, Hesse, Arp, Hepworth, Giacometti, or the Salemmes, it so clearly has other origins that such comparisons are far less interesting than the violent clues to the artist's intentions which provide the aura for these forms.[13]

Lippard's frame is one that invokes Bourgeois as a presence by requiring the 'vividness' art-historical order lacks. We may see Lippard's writing as beginning a trend in writing about Bourgeois' work which has remained dominant to the present day: finding the 'violent clues' to the artist's emotions and, by implication, to her self-hood. This dominant mode, that I term

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[10] See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London and New York, Routledge, 1989). Translated from the French by Tavistock publications, first published in France as *Archéologie du Savoir* (Paris, Editions Gallimard, 1969).
[11] Lucy Lippard, 'Louise Bourgeois, from the inside out', *Artforum* (March 1975) p. 27 reproduced in Peter Weiermair (Ed.) Louise Bourgeois.
[12] Lippard, p. 27.
[13] Ibid.

psychobiography,[14] sparked my interest because of its obvious flaws. An example of this kind of writing is the catalogue to Bourgeois' Tate Modern installation *I Do, I Undo, I Redo* (2000).[15] The curator Frances Morris opens the catalogue with her essay, *A Family Affair*, which immediately concentrates our attention upon Bourgeois' biography, her recollections and the psychological nuances of the sculptures and their maker. Morris recounts the biography of the artist in this essay as a 'key' generously given by the artist (in her 1982 slide talk at MoMA New York) that reveals the obsessional quality of her subjects and offers an insight into an artist who, Morris claims, *cannot* be approached through stylistic development or in relationship to the avant-garde movements of her time.[16] An evocative tour of the poetic resonances of Bourgeois' symbols and motifs through fairy tales and myths by Marina Warner and a collection of extracts from poems, plays and classic writings completes the catalogue and completes constructing the setting for Bourgeois and her work. The catalogue is a frame in its classic sense: a surrounding, enclosing, ordering, structure that devises and defines its subject.

An albeit partial list of other texts that exist within this frame might include: Marie-Laure Bernadac, *Louise Bourgeois* (1996); *Louise Bourgeois: Recent Works*, CAPCMusée d'Art Contemporain Bordeaux and Serpentine Gallery London (1998); Rainer Crone and Petrus Graf Schaesberg, *Louise Bourgeois - the secret of the cells* (1998); Paul Gardner, *Louise Bourgeois* (1994); Christiane Meyer-Thoss, *Louise Bourgeois* (1992); Frances Morris, *Louise Bourgeois: Stitches in Time*, Irish Museum of Modern Art (2003); Robert Storr, Paolo Herkenhoff, and Allan Schwartzman, *Louise Bourgeois* (2003); and, Deborah Wye, *Louise Bourgeois*, (1982). These volumes often but not exclusively produced by art galleries and museums share a common pattern of treating Bourgeois' work as a-historical, and beyond or outside of the usual categories of art history (that might include such notions as: style, form, movement, medium, milieu and gender).[17] They prefer instead to read Bourgeois' work through her statements, through her biography and through her extensive photographic archive that depicts, in grainy black and white, her childhood years in France. Frequently, these texts map Bourgeois' statements on to her sculpture, whilst ignoring the historical conditions of production of the sculpture and the historical moment of speech, which brought forth the statement, often many decades after the object to which it becomes attached.

Such texts, by restricting the possibility of dialogue to the personal and psychological serve to obscure those moments when, as we have seen, Bourgeois' work is existing in a complex space and engaging with the work of other artists, such as Ernst or Giacometti, or with specific theoretical matrixes. Further, the exclusive focus upon the biography and person of Bourgeois

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[14] This term is also used by Griselda Pollock in 'Old Bones and Cocktail Dresses: Louise Bourgeois and the Question of Age', *Oxford Art Journal* (vol. 22, no. 2) pp. 71-100.

[15] Frances Morris and Marina Warner, *Louise Bourgeois* (London: Tate Gallery Publishing Ltd, 2000).

[16] Morris (2000), p. 9.

[17] Marie-Laure Bernadac, *Louise Bourgeois* (Paris: Flammarion, 1996); Rainer Crone and Petrus Graf Schaesberg, *Louise Bourgeois - the secret of the cells* (Munich, London, New York: Prestel, 1998); Paul Gardner, *Louise Bourgeois* (New York: Universe Publishing, 1994); Christiane Meyer-Thoss, *Louise Bourgeois* (Zürich: Ammann Verlag, 1992); Frances Morris, *Louise Bourgeois: Stitches in Time* (Irish Museum of Modern Art, Fruitmarket Gallery Edinburgh: August Projects / Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2003); Frances Morris and Marina Warner, *Louise Bourgeois* (London: Tate Gallery Publishing Ltd.,

impedes consideration of what is undoubtedly a dense and difficult oeuvre, rich in its visual allusions and fascinating in its complexity. More than this, the narration of Bourgeois' production as a fundamental part of a coping strategy and the elucidation of her work in terms such as 'exorcism' spurred me to begin to find other narratives, other voices with which to speak this sculpture. Whilst Bourgeois herself discusses her work in terms of exorcism, and so colludes in the dissemination of this view, it is I believe, a prime instance of us having to problematize the relationship between her words and her work and consider her texts in terms of her strategies of practice rather than as simple, explanatory and confessional statements. For Bourgeois' constant revisiting of her themes undermines the cathartic purpose of exorcism (the exorcism proves not to have worked) and, further, many of her most frequently revisited motifs, such as the ever-present and ambivalent woman-house, seem difficult to conceive of in cathartic terms, relying as they do on curious juxtaposition and poetic allusion. Bourgeois' repeated representing of her successive homes and the women who complete them smacks more of nostalgia and a life long lived. The metaphor of exorcism is one example of how the personal and psychological narrative risks framing Bourgeois' practice as therapy. It is a positioning of her work typified by statements such as this of Jerry Gorovoy's in 1993:

> There's a certain sense in Louise's work, when you spend a lot of time with her, it's not even like art. I mean what she makes is dealing with day to day living, she's trying to get through the day, deal with her anxieties, her fears and what she does ends up as art. I don't even see it as somebody sitting down and saying 'I'm going to make art today.' I don't really see that as what she's about.[18]

Gorovoy's characterization, whilst aiming to make the sculptural object visible as a literal trace is deeply disempowering. This kind of reduction, of the craft and the conceptualizing of art making to the destructive howl of the tortured soul, more than any of the other flaws of psychobiographic writing, spurred me to find other narratives and other approaches to Bourgeois' complex body of work. This thesis does not deny or undermine the strong emotions that inform Bourgeois' work, but there is imply no need for me to add to the corpus of work that has been done on this interpretive level. Instead, this thesis hopes to re-empower Bourgeois as a tactician, a skilled player of the game of contemporary art. I shall both quote from examples of psychobiographical writing and refer to the above texts en masse as 'the monographs' on Louise Bourgeois. Beyond 'the monographs', there are the reviews and articles of both the art and daily press. Reaching an even wider audience and with a shorter brief these, in the main, echo the psychobiographical bent of the monographs and I refer to this material mainly in chapter four where I reconsider Bourgeois' installation for the Tate Modern (2000).

There are few exceptions to this general category 'monographs', *Louise Bourgeois* edited by Peter Weiermair (1995) gathers together scholarship by: Rosalind Krauss, Lucy Lippard, Thomas McEvilley and Robert Storr; and *Louise Bourgeois: Memory and Architecture* (2000) which, alongside more psychobiographical writings, includes essays by Mieke Bal and Lynne

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2000); Robert Storr, Paolo Herkenhoff, and Allan Schwartzman, *Louise Bourgeois* (London: Phaidon, 2003); Deborah Wye, *Louise Bourgeois* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1982).

[18] Jerry Gorovoy in *Arena: Louise Bourgeois* (Dir. Nigel Finch, BBC films, 1993).

Cooke.[19] We might, at a push, include Bal's *Louise Bourgeois' Spider* in this group, for although it is a scholarly and theoretical work, and in no way a monograph or survey text, it can be found alongside catalogues and monographs in art gallery bookshops and so reaches a wider audience, but it truly belongs to the academic writing discussed below.[20] We might also include the edition of *Parkett* magazine devoted to Bourgeois and Robert Gober, whose contributors ran the gamut from museum directors to Mignon Nixon – *Parkett* certainly reached a wider public, of artists, but its critical impact was limited by its bite-size contributions.[21] The press, while failing to sustain any considered critique of the formation of the dominant discourse on Bourgeois, does have dissenting voices, most notably those I have quoted, Richard Dorment and Brian Sewell, both vociferous critics of Bourgeois' work.[22]

Excellent theoretical work is now being done that takes up the challenge of Lippard's frame and offers alternative frameworks with which to theorize Bourgeois. However, beyond a few exceptions (such as those already listed) this growing body of work remains largely restricted to academic circles and does not seem to impact greatly upon the production of repetitive and simplistic monographic studies. Therefore, the impact upon the wider public and upon the art market remains minimal. For instance, Nixon's important work, highly respected in academic circles, has only made it as far as footnotes elsewhere (excepting her article in *Parkett*).[23] For instance, in her contribution to the Serpentine Gallery / CapcMusée d'art Contemporain de Bordeaux catalogue (1998), Louise Neri writes:

> If we were to follow the wisdom of certain psychoanalytical models currently in vogue, we would almost certainly construe from her vivid accounts that Louise Bourgeois is forever lodged in the perpetual present of her unconscious childhood fantasies.[24]

Neri indicates that this comment refers in particular to Nixon's Kleinian analysis in 'Bad Enough Mother', and to 'the endless Freudian and Lacanian analyses of Bourgeois work that have appeared over the last two decades.'[25] Neri wilfully misreads Nixon, who neither relies on Bourgeois' 'vivid accounts' nor concludes anything about Bourgeois' psychological state but

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[19] Peter Weiermair (Ed.) *Louise Bourgeois* 1995; Jerry Gorovoy, Danielle Tilkin, Joseph Helfenstein, Beatriz Colomina, Christiane Terrisse, Lynne Cooke, Mieke Bal, Jennifer Bloomer, *Louise Bourgeois - Memory and Architecture* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro De Arte Reina Sofia, 1999).

[20] Such as at DIA Beacon, New York.

[21] 'Louise Bourgeois/Robert Gober', *Parkett* (no 27, 1991).

[22] See for example: Richard Dorment, 'Daddy's angry little girl gets even', *Daily Telegraph* (November 18, 1998) or Brian Sewell, 'Into The Parlour of a Sad Old Bat' *Evening Standard* (November 26, 1998).

[23] See for instance, *Louise Bourgeois: Œuvres Récentes Recent Works* (France: Musée d'art Contemporain de Bordeaux; Serpentine Gallery, 1997) pp. 87, and Frances Morris (2000) p. 17, footnote 10.

[24] Louise Neri, *Louise Bourgeois* (Serpentine Gallery / CapcMusée d'art Contemporain de Bordeaux, 1998), p 87. Neri writes, 'If we were to follow the wisdom of certain psychoanalytical models currently in vogue we would almost certainly construe from her vivid accounts that Louise Bourgeois is forever lodged in the perpetual present of her unconscious childhood fantasies'. Neri's footnote indicates that this comment refers in particular to Mignon Nixon's Kleinian analysis in 'Bad Enough Mother', *October*, (71) winter 1995, pp. 71-92 and to 'the endless Freudian and Lacanian analyses of Bourgeois work that have appeared over the last two decades'. Neri not only wilfully misreads Nixon who neither relies on Bourgeois' 'vivid accounts' nor concludes anything about Bourgeois' psychological state but theorises instead through Klein's structures how Bourgeois' tactics of play and aggression produce art objects that may be understood as part-objects.

[25] Nixon (1995).

theorises instead, through Klein's structures, how Bourgeois' tactics of play and aggression produce art objects that may be understood as part-objects. In fact, it is Neri's dramatic and journalistic writing and that of many other gallery and magazine authors that locks Bourgeois into her childhood fantasies. Implicated in the dominance and persistence of this kind of writing are the activities of the art market, for whom there is little benefit either in revisionism, or in questioning what has become a tight and effective dynamic between the gallery, or institution, buyer and artist – who is made present within the psychobiographical frame by her testimony, photograph, and the projection of her work as a deeply personal trace. This thesis remains aware of Bourgeois' position in relation to the art market and how this fluid relationship to sales and gallery contracts, sits in tension with her practice whilst it does not pursue an economic assessment.

This thesis reflects upon the activity of framing as sketching out, drafting, or drawing up the field of study rather than attempting to devise a post-Lippardian 'framework' that is somehow *more* adequate than that of psychobiography. The frame then is a structuring force of this project; whether it is remaining aware of what is outside the frame (as border or surround) and why, or, speculating what may be a frame-up (as scheme, collusion, plot) or recognizing that to 'frame' Bourgeois' sculpture is not only trying to understand her work but implies framing 'Bourgeois' herself, as a portrait, as some kind of presence.[26] It is by writing other narratives and approaches that we are able to see how Bourgeois is framed.

In *Figuring Jasper Johns*, Fred Orton distinguishes Jasper Johns a 'real person known to no one but himself, and not even to him' from 'Jasper Johns' who made the objects Orton studies.[27] Orton continues: 'because he is unknowable, I saw no reason to go out of my way to make the acquaintance of Jasper Johns. I saw little point in questioning him about the work of "Jasper Johns".'[28] Orton's positioning of Johns as 'author' in a way that serves solely to adjoin the various works by 'Jasper Johns' is a move I am in sympathy with. I avoided seeking out Bourgeois for an interview as it seemed irrelevant to my project, my concern is with 'Louise Bourgeois' the public persona that ties together a group of sculptures and that operates strategically in order to manoeuvre a space for those objects within the art market and within the constraints of the frames writers impose. This thesis examines these strategies as they operate in the public sphere. Julian Barnes made this related plea in *Flaubert's Parrot:*

> Why does the writing make us chase the writer? Why can't we leave well alone? Why aren't the books enough? Flaubert wanted them to be: few writers believe more in the objectivity of the written text and the insignificance of the writer's personality, and yet still we disobediently pursue.[29]

The profound collapse of Bourgeois' life onto her oeuvre, through her autobiographical self-narration and the bent of both psychobiography and psychoanalysis, makes it even harder to

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[26] 'The expression framing the sign has several advantages over context: it reminds us that framing is something we do; it hints of the frame-up ('falsifying evidence beforehand in order to make someone appear guilty'), a major use of context; and it eludes the incipient positivism of 'context' by alluding to the semiotic function of framing in art, and yet the frame itself may be nothing tangible, pure articulation.' Jonathan Culler, *Framing the Sign* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) p. ix.
[27] Fred Orton, *Figuring Jasper Johns* (London: Reaktion Books, 1994) p. 14.
[28] Ibid., p. 15.

'leave well alone': to leave aside the 'real person known to no one but himself, and not even to him.' As I move on now to discuss the less well circulated academic level of writing about Bourgeois we shall see that Bourgeois' work is considered here in a quite different, and far less personal, manner. I refer in this thesis to Louise Bourgeois the public persona of the sculptor and, in chapters one and four, as a historical figure living a real life, but who that person is remains a private matter. Present throughout this work is the awareness of the impossibility of reaching a 'real person', and this thesis lacks that desire. My concern is the career of Bourgeois, not her inner life, therefore Bourgeois' most well known self-narrations are absent from this study (such as Sadie). Where such material is presented it is done so strategically, not to reveal something about a mysterious, real Louise Bourgeois but to illustrate that the historical 'truth' of such stories is not relevant and, further, that the persistent concern with these statements as revelatory serves to obscure our understanding of how these narratives operate within the discourse of Bourgeois' sculpture.

To turn to the academic level of critical and theoretical writing in more detail, it is this work that has served to shape my project. It is a large and diverse collection and I shall not evaluate each contribution in this introduction, concentrating instead on how aspects of this critical literature have shaped this project. The most frequent critical approach to Bourgeois has brought psychoanalytic theory to bear upon a feminist agenda, theorizing Bourgeois' work as a critical tool in the search for a feminine subjectivity that is not defined in terms of the phallus. So numerous are the critical writings that utilize psychoanalysis that the section below is devoted to this literature and to an assessment of the value of the psychoanalytic approach in considering Louise Bourgeois' work.

Some of the most interesting writing is gathered in two publications: a special issue of the *Oxford Art Journal* (1999) edited by Nixon, whose PhD dissertation (1997) on Bourgeois is at present being prepared for publication[30] and *The MoMA Papers* (1996), which collected together spoken papers from a one-day conference on Bourgeois held in 1995. The special issue of the *Oxford Art Journal* may, more than any other collection, have affected the critical reception of Bourgeois in this country. It brings together recent research by Anne M. Wagner, Briony Fer, Alex Potts, Mignon Nixon, Griselda Pollock and Mieke Bal. The contributions to this journal have been crucial to my research, in presenting possibilities for new and different narratives about Bourgeois. Wagner contributes a disconcertingly historical account of Bourgeois' 'prehistory'; it is an approach that is very true to the work but quite against the grain of Bourgeois' professed distance from the prehistoric and the 'primitive art' that was her husband's subject. Wagner's 'Bourgeois Prehistory or the Ransom of Fantasies' is orientated towards the sculptures and their prehistoric allusions. It is a direction also taken by McEvilley's 'History and Prehistory in the Work of Louise Bourgeois.'[31]

Bal in 'Narrative Inside Out, Louise Bourgeois' Spider as Theoretical Object', follows the threads of narrativity in Bourgeois' *Cells* and attests to the possibility of Bourgeois' work carrying a

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[29] Julian Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985) p. 13.
[30] Mignon Nixon, *Louise Bourgeois and the Logic of the Part-Object, 1947-82* (PhD thesis, City University of New York, 1997) cited in Meyer (2003).

conceptual weight and a theoretical position beyond the realms of the psychic. For Bal, who collected this and other recent articles in *Louise Bourgeois' Spider* (2002), Bourgeois' work posits a position on narrativity itself. Bal argues that the period of looking at Bourgeois' *Cells* enables an activity of performative narrativity done by the viewer, such that the bodiliness of the act of viewing is connected to the utterance, or enunciation, of the work in the present moment, like a cry or grunt. Whilst Bal used psychoanalytic theory in her earlier writings on Rembrandt, she aligns psychoanalysis with psychobiography in her work on Bourgeois, insisting that both are 'anteriority narratives', looking backwards, whereas Bourgeois' recent work, notably *Spider* (1997), asserts its 'nowness'. Bal wants to establish a radical anti-historicist and anti-traditional position that reads against the standard works on Bourgeois and positions her in Bal's own method of 'preposterous history', a method she has previously used to read 'wildly' across history and allow artists to 'prefigure rather than to follow'. Bal rejects Bourgeois' statements, insisting that that however serious and to the point they are, they cannot, and must not, stand in for a critical engagement with her work.

My project began with a similar refusal of Bourgeois' autobiographical narratives, but it has been apparent that such a clear rejection is not possible owing to the statements' strategic importance in relation to Bourgeois' processes of making, hence my thorough engagement with the statements throughout this thesis. Further, there are times when it is not possible to distinguish Bourgeois' statements as outside the work, there are many moments when they operate sculpturally, rather than evidentially, as we shall see. Bal struggles to maintain her radical stance and it seems that the heart of her writing relies precisely upon 'anteriority' structures that she wants to leave behind: 'As an antidote to the smell of dust, the young girl's perfume bottles are refreshing.'[32] Bal positions the perfume bottles of *Spider* against the dust of anteriority, but those ancient bottles have been cleaned of the dust of their long years: they reek of the past made present by erasure. Bal's metaphorical writing, so deeply involved in Bourgeois' past, undermines the device of contrasting the young girl's fripperies to the art historian's dusty old methods. Bal's work helped me to think closely about statements and narrative mastery, for while Bal claims Bourgeois' *Cells* 'insist on the failure of element-by-element translation for rendering or explaining the work as a whole'[33] her own evocative writing is itself a mastering form. Despite the problems with Bal's work, her rich writing offers another approach to what is a difficult body of material that lies outside the standard psychobiographical method.

Both Fer and Potts concentrate a new intensity upon the viewer and how Bourgeois' work impacts upon the stability of ones' subjectivity. This concentrated looking away from the maker proposes another tactic to consider Bourgeois' work beyond the psychobiographic frame. In 'Louise Bourgeois – Sculptural Confrontations' Potts outlines how the viewer is positioned in a one-to-one encounter with the work, a kind of existential confrontation, where resistance is the only recourse. The viewer is themselves staged by Bourgeois' structures and so made to enact publicly what are usually seen as interiorised experiences and provoked by the confrontation

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[31] McEvilley (1995).
[32] Bal (1999) p. 121.

into a state of mind between anxiety and fascination, and this is coupled with a pacing, unsettled anxiety. Potts notes that Bourgeois' stories are not so much explanations of the work as allegories of the viewer's engagement with the work, a view which comes to terms with the difficult relationship between the body of the work itself and the pressing presence of the artist through her fable-like tales and frequent interviews.[34] Fer's 'Objects Beyond Objecthood' asks where the subject is placed by Bourgeois' work and finds that place at the 'fault line within subjectivity itself' where desires and drives meet. Both papers revealed the possibilities of considering not only the audience of the work but the possible implications for our understanding of subjectivity, which I explore in chapter three. Pollock's and Nixon's contributions, which utilize a psychoanalytic approach, are considered in more detail below.

The contributors to *The MoMA Papers* are: Phyllida Barlow, Ian Cole, Michael Corris, Katy Deepwell, Karyn Faure Walker, Pamela Kember, Adrian Rifkin and Hilary Robinson. This publication is interesting in the range of voices it brings together crossing art history and art practice and giving voices to artists to speak beyond the brief eulogies by artists such as Richard Serra in Charlotte Kotik's *Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory*.[35] Several papers stand out from this collection. Most notable for my work is Barlow's 'The Sneeze of Louise', which draws upon her own experience as a sculptor to render in writing the vivid resonances of Bourgeois' work. Barlow concentrates upon our time-bound experience and likens both the anticipation of the nearly-sexual sneeze and the awareness of time when in suspense, to the surveilling, monitoring mirrors of Bourgeois' *Cells*: sculptures that, she believes, capture an almost palpable, sexual charge. Barlow, by not looking outside sculpture for a theoretical position, or meta-discourse, asserts that Bourgeois' engagement with sculpture is her works central aspect. Another artist, Faure Walker, addresses the often ignored and deeply problematic question of the fetish. Bourgeois denies any relation to the primitive, but her narratives and those of the monographs call to the 'power' of the work, as Faure Walker notes, 'Bourgeois calls on the power of materials to put in place a set of archetypal relations in proxy for the devastating emotions one suffers.'[36] Faure Walker suggests that the 'primitive' fetish gave permission for modern art to condense emotion and allows for an expanded metaphor so that through simplification a symbol of universal reference is achieved.

Finally, from this collection, Rifkin's article 'Louise Bourgeois: Reading the Sexual for Something Else' draws together class and privilege with the experiences of both subjectivity and pain in Bourgeois' work. Rifkin's subtext is a critique of melodrama, overstatement and over-seriousness in Bourgeois' work, and the criticism around it, which threatens to undermine the value of her practice. Rifkin's paper is a breath of fresh air because he is prepared to write critically about Bourgeois' work with an openness, or even cynicism, not seen elsewhere. For instance, Rifkin's initial proposition is that we must not take Bourgeois too seriously at the level

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[33] Bal (1999) p. 123.

[34] See also the final chapter to Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000).

[35] Charlotte Kotik, *Louise Bourgeois, the Locus of Memory 1982-1993* (New York: The Brooklyn Museum with Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1994).

[36] Caryn Faure Walker, 'Memory, Poetry, Structure in the Work of Louise Bourgeois' in *The MoMA Papers* (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1996) p. 54.

of sexual trouble, for to do this would be to render her imagery as obvious as Dalí's, and hence just as vulgar and as uninteresting. In one continuous sweep Rifkin compares Bourgeois' work to the 'middle brow morality', 'pretended emotional charge' and 'historical sentimentality' of Delaroche, the labour of invisible Victorian working women and the brutal affective charge of David. Rifkin's is a polemical reading against the grain of the dominant type of art writing. He premises his argument upon the notion that Bourgeois distracts us from sex and sexuality; her statuesque forms are unlike the erotic and sexual: they masquerade heterosexual neuroses not explore them. It is, for him, this parodic quality that is the work's strength and its necessity. Such diverse writing, from Barlow to Rifkin, helped to set the direction of this thesis as against the monographs. These texts reaffirmed the importance of the historical over the personal, and the sculptural and experiential as an appropriate response to sculpture which is profoundly affective and simultaneously engaged with sculptural problems. At the same time, by writing against Bourgeois' dominant discourse in the monographs, the texts I have mentioned here have found strategies that enable them to write *for* the work.

Beyond *The MoMA Papers*, the *Oxford Art Journal* and those texts I have already listed, we might note critical work by: Cooke, *Farewell to the Doll House* (1999), Ann Eden Gibson, *Louise Bourgeois's Retroactive Politics of Gender* (1994), Krauss, *Louise Bourgeois: Portrait of the Artist as Fillette* (1999), Nixon's: *Pretty as a Picture: Louise Bourgeois' Fillette*, (1991), *Bad Enough Mother* (1995) and *Posing the Phallus* (2000), and Christian Terrisse, *Louise Bourgeois: Woman at Work* (2000).[37] As I have noted, while there are exceptions, the academic level of critical literature shows a reliance upon psychoanalysis. Both Laura Dawn Meyer and Lynn Marie Somers take this as giving permission for their recent psychoanalytically orientated theses. Meyer uses psychoanalytic theory to position Bourgeois' subjecthood in respect to modernism and feminism and Somers brings psychoanalytic theory to help her to negotiate the image of the mother in Bourgeois' work. To my knowledge, this volume will be the fourth PhD dissertation written on Bourgeois' work (Nixon, 1997; Somers, 2001; Meyer, 2003), and my project has developed in a very different direction. For instance, in chapter two I mention a well-known anecdote of Bourgeois keeping and sculpting from her empty milk cartons. For Somers this is an important anecdote, the milk cartons signified Bourgeois' maternal role and even, by extension, the breast, and the anecdote ties in to her wider tracing of the maternal in Bourgeois' practice. My interpretation rests upon the collection and reuse of these cartons not upon psychic symbolism. Whilst this thesis does not deny the symbolic in Bourgeois' work, it is not an analysis of her symbols.

I share with other contemporary writers (Somers, Gibson, Wagner, for instance) the sense of the importance of history, despite the protests of Bourgeois and her monograph writers that her

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[37] Lynne Cooke, 'Farewell to the Doll House' in *Louise Bourgeois - Memory and Architecture* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro De Arte Reina Sofia, 1999) pp. 63-74; Ann Eden Gibson, 'Louise Bourgeois's Retroactive Politics of Gender', *Art Journal* (Winter 1994) pp. 44-7; Rosalind Krauss, *Louise Bourgeois:* 'Portrait of the artist as Fillette' in Peter Weiermair (Ed.) *Louise Bourgeois*, (1995) pp. 23-31; Mignon Nixon, 'Pretty as a Picture: Louise Bourgeois' Fillette', *Parkett* (1991) pp. 48-54; Mignon Nixon, 'Bad Enough Mother' (1995); Mignon Nixon, 'Posing the Phallus', *October* (no. 92 2000) pp. 98-127; Christian Terrisse, 'Louise Bourgeois: Woman at Work' in *Louise Bourgeois - Memory and Architecture* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro De Arte Reina Sofia, 1999) pp. 53-62.

timeless work is set apart from movements and milieus. Chapter one is an attempt to read Bourgeois' work *in* her time and throughout this thesis is an awareness of time passing: the time-gap between sculpture and fabulous narrative and in chapter four time passes slowly for a housebound and frail Bourgeois as I explore the consequences of her ageing. Two characteristics set my work apart from other academic writing: firstly, my concern with matters of the studio and identifying the object of study, whether a sculptural form, installation, image or statement, and secondly, my desire to write outside the framework of psychoanalytic theory. Whilst the latter might seem, at the very least, a quixotic approach to an artist herself versed in psychoanalytic terminology, and whose narratives of her work point inexorably to the psyche, it is a position I hope shall become clear below.

Psychoanalytic writings and Bourgeois' Words

Bal frames psychoanalysis and psychobiography as the same kind of process, but those academic writers who use psychoanalysis defend their difference from the psychobiography of monographs and press writing. In 'Old Bones and Cocktail Dresses', Griselda Pollock writes:

> Psychobiography individualises the relations between life and art work. Psychoanalytical readings of artistic practices and texts work at the intersection between individual histories and intensities and structural conditions, in both psychic structure and language, for creating meaning that, disguising any person's particular urgency, engage other subjectivities at the site of the text.[38]

Psychoanalytic criticism, then, differentiates itself by looking outwards, beyond the work. It is the viewer whose trauma is being analysed in the work made evident by the artist. Psychoanalytic orientated writing depends upon establishing an equivalence between the narrative products of the analysand and art objects. Art objects are considered as psychic residues (indicated in such texts with words such as 'rupture' and 'trace') or their gaps and slips correspond to those of the verbal 'cover-up' that allow the analyst to penetrate deeper into the analysand's resistance. Once this equivalence is made then the two procedures part, for psychoanalytic therapy aims to reveal biographical and phantastic secrets, moving the analysand towards a new self-narration that permits healing. Psychoanalytic criticism, on the other hand, is wary of aligning the artist with analysand and so refuses to speculate upon the specific psyche of the maker (or it slips into psychobiography) but reveals instead the principles of psychic structure, which are common to all of us. Hence, the psychoanalytic importance of the work is what it reveals of the structures of our trauma and our resistance.

There is a danger of slippage at that crucial juncture, the intersection of 'individual histories and intensities and structural conditions', that risks placing the artist upon the couch. Such problems beset Meyer' recent work, whose attempt to outline the psychic subject Bourgeois presents, as a challenge to both Modernism and Feminism, repeatedly slips into a personal psychoanalytic reading of Bourgeois through her work.[39] Julie Nicoletta's article 'Louise Bourgeois's Femmes-

[38] Pollock (1999) p. 88.
[39] Laura Dawn Meyer, *Louise Bourgeois and the Subject of Modernism* (PhD thesis, University of California Los Angeles, 2003).

Maisons, Confronting Lacan' shows a further risk of slippage in the psychoanalytical approach.[40] Nicoletta suggests that a comparison may be made between Bourgeois' work on the dilemma of communication and Lacan's idea that the unconscious is structured like a language. For Lacan, the structure of the unconscious prevents communication because real objects are substituted by signifiers that themselves are prey to the displacements and divisions of metonymy and metaphor. For Nicoletta, Bourgeois' ambiguity, her refusal to foreclose on possible meaning, elucidates the substitutions and displacements of the unconscious. However, Nicoletta attempts to secure a connection between Bourgeois and Lacan on both a biographical and a theoretical level. Nicoletta relies upon the autobiographical memories that she argues (correctly) that Bourgeois uses to obscure difficult issues in her art, and in interview Bourgeois was, of course, brilliantly ambiguous. Yes she had known him, but she would not say when or where and yes, she knew his ideas but simultaneously she considered him a 'quack doctor'. Here, Bourgeois' ambiguity goes beyond her sculptures and drawings to interfere with Nicoletta's psychoanalytic framing. Nicoletta's article shows psychoanalysis slipping into a dependency upon 'individual histories' and relying upon a 'person's particular urgency': she loses the intersections with 'structural conditions' that for Pollock defines the psychoanalytic, art historical enterprise.

Nixon contributes the exceptional 'Eating Words' to the *Oxford Art Journal* in which she suggests that Bourgeois' 1974 installation *Destruction of the Father*, concludes the use of the part-object (Klein) in Bourgeois' oeuvre; making a climactic moment where the entry of the subject into language, that Nixon has previously examined, is replaced by the discovery of an alternative type of vocalisation, affective speech.[41] I applaud Nixon's moves to direct our attention away from Bourgeois' selfhood as a shamanic and damaged presence behind the work and instead project Bourgeois as a critical and strategic agent engaging with the debates that have come to be seen as central to our understanding of the art of the latter half of the twentieth century. At stake in Nixon's work is the possibility of an aggressive feminine subject neither bound by Lacanian and Freudian limitations nor prey to the criticisms of essentialist feminist theory and it shows none of the slippage illustrated above. Crucially, through Klein's writings, Nixon has been able to theorize the anger and violence that is a vital component of Bourgeois' self-narration. Violence is a part of Bourgeois' public persona as evidenced in the *Arena* film where there are no holds barred as Bourgeois throws objects and even breaks a plaster of one of her works to show Finch the level of her feelings.[42] Nixon's closely argued theorisation of violence forces us to reckon with psychoanalytic criticism as a serious business.

Nixon's precision though reveals another troubling element of the psychoanalytical approach, the tendency to impute psychic value to studio processes, which largely depends upon taking

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[40] Julie Nicoletta, 'Louise Bourgeois's Femmes-Maisons, Confronting Lacan', *Woman's Art Journal* (Fall 1992/Winter 1993) pp. 21-26.

[41] Nixon (1995).

[42] In *Ode À Ma Mère,* Somers cites another film where Bourgeois smashes crockery on screen: Robert Hughes *American Visions* (Virginia and London: PBS and BBC, 1997). Somers also recounts an anecdote in the film *Chère Louise: portrait of the Sculptor Louise Bourgeois* by Brigitte Cornand (1995) of Mme Joséphine Bourgeois keeping crockery by her at the table which she would dramatically smash if Louis Bourgeois became angry at the table.

Bourgeois' statements as face-value testimony. For instance, the nails in the *Portrait of CY* (1947-9) are narrated by Bourgeois as a purely psychic solution, she describes (sculpturally) nailing shut the mouth of Catherine Yarrow after an argument, and the sculpture is often cited to illustrate Bourgeois' cathartic approach to making sculpture. However, the frenzied action Bourgeois implies is destructive in the studio and the density of these nails are inscribed with an exhausting patience. The punishment of CY is purely symbolic; the tiring and repetitive studio processes that manufacture the appearance of frenzy is a different matter. In 'Bad Enough Mother', Nixon suggests Bourgeois' studio techniques – inside-out construction, multiplication, splitting and conflation – articulate Klein's construction of aggression, loss and fantasied repair and recovery:[43]

> [Bourgeois' techniques] subvert the phallic logic of gender and disarticulate the Oedipal body; techniques of pouring, cutting, scratching and fragmentation that enact the ferocity of the drives or alternatively of stitching, wrapping and polishing that effects repair of damage inflicted through aggression.[44]

Cutting, in particular, has been interpreted by Bourgeois in psychic terms. There is, though, a great difference between a destructive cut or tear and the controlled gouge of the burin or bandsaw, which is purposeful, which is a line drawn in matter. Hence, to impute psychic importance to studio techniques is to be complicit in the collapse of the artist into the work through her narratives and does not attend to the formal language of making affective sculpture. Griselda Pollock writes:

> Contemporary psychoanalysis attends much more to the processes and structures of psychic functioning that structure the making, the viewing and the response to aesthetic experience than to deducing biographically related interpretation from signs and experience.[45]

But it is not clear to me that there is always such a distinction between the psychic function and the biographical interpretation from signs. An example of this kind of biographical deduction appears in Nixon's outstanding *Posing the Phallus* (2000). Nixon's argument rests upon reading Bourgeois' work for burlesque and she calls upon two photographs of Bourgeois to evidence her humour and playfulness: the portrait by Mapplethorpe and a picture of Bourgeois and Miró. It is not the sculpture *Fillette* as much as the photograph of Bourgeois holding *Fillette* that is important (with its attendant narrative of the day of the shoot). The Miró photograph incorporates caricature into Bourgeois' early sculptures, which, without the biographical information that Bourgeois and Miró were engaged in a parody of Picasso, appear deadly serious modernist *Personages*. Again the artist's image and her biography become key critical documents and indicate an implicit reliance upon the statements of self-narration that are acknowledged as problematic (Pollock, Bal). It seems that Bourgeois' testimony of destruction and reparation are taken at face value if approached through a Kleinian frame whereas her testimony of childhood betrayal (a classic trauma often cited in psychobiography) may be left to one side. This is not to imply that there is no place for Bourgeois' statements and biography in this thesis, we have already seen that I offer an alternative reading of an early narrative of

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[43] These wonderful terms describe casting and assemblage.
[44] Nixon (1995) p. 91.
[45] Pollock (1999) p. 89.

carton sculpting and in chapter one I rely upon Bourgeois' early letters and diary entries. Rather, one must remain aware of the selection, from an unusually full archive, of selected words and anecdotes that support one's position. I wish to question what the object of study is in the field 'Louise Bourgeois'? Statements, images and sculptures are each considered as objects of study in this thesis, as real or potential sculptural forms, and as strategic positionings within the wider visual debates of the moment and within the art market. Thus 'evidence', 'testimony' and 'truth' become secondary to the strategies of making sculpture and making a career.

Bourgeois' interventions, her interviews, titles and self-narration are complex objects that I both use and question throughout this thesis. They do not for instance, in my view, undermine my decision to write beyond the frame of the psychoanalytic, as I shall explain. On the one hand Bourgeois constantly seems to offer support to the psychoanalytic approach. Her interviews apparently offer a testimony of her memories, her family and her childhood. Her work also seems to rely upon exploring memory as if it were a regressive rediscovery of childhood experiences. As a consequence, Bourgeois' work is frequently read as illustrating trauma, presenting a psychic space, or, presenting the theory or scene of psychoanalysis itself. Further, Bourgeois' interviews can take on an analytic aspect: digging into her past and her work for symbolic meanings. Relevant here are the interpersonal confrontations that are frequently Bourgeois' subject or the overt references to psychoanalytic primal scenes such as the location of childhood sexuality in the *Red Rooms* (1994)[46] and the patriarchal cannibalism of *Destruction of the Father*.[47] In addition, there are notable instances of Bourgeois presenting the idea that emotional progress may be made through sculpture, such as: 'My early work is the fear of falling. Later it became the art of falling. How to fall without hurting yourself. Later on it is the art of hanging in there.'[48] Bourgeois called a bronze cumul-type sculpture of 1967 *Unconscious Landscape*; the title has brought this work to the fore of Bourgeois' oeuvre.[49] Finally, in a 1998 newspaper interview Bourgeois says, 'My work functions as psychoanalysis. That's what the function of the work is.' Suddenly such instances seem innumerable.[50]

Bourgeois though, is predictably contrary. Bourgeois has written about Freud[51] and, as we have seen in her interview with Nicoletta, dismissed Lacan as a 'quack doctor'[52] claiming: 'He [Lacan] was a con man. Freud and Lacan did nothing for the artist. They were barking up the wrong tree.' The apparent difficulty in reconciling these two attitudes (that her work is psychoanalysis but that the greats of the field are mistaken quacks) could not be greater. What is fascinating in Bourgeois' article 'Freud's Toys' is not any great insight into his theories and writings, or indeed into the collection of antiquities she was purportedly writing about, but her continued

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[46] *Red Rooms* (1994) reproduced in Stuart Morgan and Frances Morris, *Rites of Passage: Art for the End of the Century* (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1995).
[47] *Destruction of the Father* (1974) reproduced extensively.
[48] Louise Bourgeois, 'Self Expression Is Sacred and Fatal - Statements', in Meyer-Thoss (1992) p. 177.
[49] See reproduction in Meyer-Thoss (1992) p. 193.
[50] Bourgeois in Liz Jobey, 'The Confessions of Louise Bourgeois', *The Guardian Weekend* (May 16, 1998) p. 17.
[51] Louise Bourgeois 'Freud' Toys', *Artforum* (January, 1990) pp. 111-113.
[52] See Nicoletta, p. 22, or see Meyer-Thoss p. 200. Both examples appear to be separate instances of the same opinion because Meyer-Thoss's text is based upon interviews, but this is unverifiable.

identification with him as exhausted and perhaps resentful of his patients: the 'maggots'. Bourgeois writes,

> The truth is that Freud did nothing for artists, or for the artist's problem, the artist's torment – to be an artist involves some suffering. That's why artists repeat themselves – because they have no access to a cure.[53]

A mere two years after her claim that her work is psychoanalysis, this statement undermines the apparently therapeutic 'exorcism' and the value of Freud's work.

Bourgeois' contrary self-presentation highlights a knowing complexity that complicates and undermines a simple reading of her pieces as effecting the theoretical models of Freud or his heirs and questions our reliance upon her other statements, whether about depression, exorcism or repair. Too often Bourgeois' statements are read as crudely expressive, ignoring her ability to control and disrupt these media interactions. Bourgeois' strong, declarative statements direct the attention of interviews along certain paths leaving others un-trodden. I argue that if one is to get *more* out of Bourgeois' writings and interviews, then rather than leave them to one side, one must be prepared to take a more complex view of her strategies as a speaker. It is possible, for instance, that Bourgeois' language strategy involves deceit, as Bourgeois alludes to in *Ode À Ma Mère* (1995), and this possibility remains in play throughout the thesis. *Ode À Ma Mère*, a verse that is clearly part of her visual practice rather than a statement about it, introduces a relationship between lure and trap in a poetic voice that shifts between points of view:

> Blame, fault.
> Blame who? No one.
> Neither you, nor him, nor her, nor them. Simply no one.
> No one but you.
> But yourself.
> Consequently I give and then I take back.
> I make promises
> and then I change my mind.
> I drop hints,
> I imply things
> The better to deceive.[54]

The ensnaring through hint and lure remains in poesis; Bourgeois presents another lure for the curious writer. The complexity of Bourgeois' language is present throughout this work; in the first chapter, I consider the difference between Bourgeois' early diaries and letters and her more mature statements and interviews. In chapter two I re-evaluate of the status of her statements and interviews in chapter three I consider the importance of Bourgeois' relationship with the media and how her manipulation of that relationship affects what she says. In chapter four I note how Bourgeois' most recent interviews show a quite different use of language; throughout is an awareness of Bourgeois' strategic self-positioning through her words and the time span of these three chapters, over forty years illustrates how Bourgeois' intentions, needs and subject-position have changed.

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[53] Bourgeois (1990).

[54] Louise Bourgeois, *Ode À Ma Mère*, a suite of nine spider etchings (Paris: Editions du Solstice, 1995) in *Louise Bourgeois: Destruction Of The Father / Reconstruction Of The Father* (London: Violette Editions, 1998) p. 328.

The making of visual art is a complex activity allowing for multiple and conflicting truths to coexist in either a single piece or across one's practice. A sculpture might be gestural (expressive mark making) and conceptual (participating in a larger visual and cultural discourse) and autobiographical (containing as a motif some item or symbol from one's life) and yet no one of these elements are its core or 'essence'. In the same way, Jarry's *L'amour Absolu* can be read as three entirely different stories: the vigil of a condemned man before his execution, the monologue of an insomniac who dreams he has been condemned to die and the story of Christ.[55] It is conceivable that both of Bourgeois' professed positions on psychoanalysis, or neither, function at any point. Beyond this multiplicity, the translation into language of visual ideas and meanings by artists may not necessarily be codified in ways that parallel inter-language translation (itself theoretically problematic). Instead, language use can be creative; it may not have the finished, concentrated energy of poetry but is a testing out of phraseological force and plasticity, pushing the medium. The possibility remains that Bourgeois' statements may sometimes be word sketches, doodles with language. In chapter two I outline a strategy of practice for Bourgeois that may envelop language. In chapter three I extend this strategy to argue that her self images, her own body and those of others around her are absorbed, incorporated, as sculptural material.

Bourgeois' words on psychoanalysis too must be taken as complex utterances; we have to think around Bourgeois' words. To accept the veracity of Bourgeois' claim that her work *is* psychoanalysis would collapse the claim that psychoanalytic art history is not analysing the artist. The sculptures would reduce into mere evidence of Bourgeois' self-analytic process, failing Pollock's demand that psychoanalytic art history look beyond the specificity of the artist. On the other hand, to accept the contention that Freud and Lacan have done nothing for artists is equally difficult. Psychoanalytic language suffuses Bourgeois' interviews and statements and as she grows older she seems more inclined to consider that a psychic (usually Freudian) explanation contains most meaning, power and relevance. Bourgeois' is an expressive art practice, and if her sense of self is loosely Freudian then this is an inherent part of her self-expression. This thesis considers Bourgeois' statements as strategic interventions that cannot provide evidence for, or against, the psychoanalytic approach.

Juliet Mitchell observes that the premise of psychoanalysis is not memory but forgetting – it is the gaps in memory, the repressions and omissions and more importantly, in the time before memory, the amnesia of infancy that are important to psychoanalysis.[56] It seems odd that this is the dominant mode of discussing the practice of an artist whose work – since the mid-1970s – is premised upon remembering. Bourgeois' work is about a highly conscious relationship with memory and with the past and I discuss this insistent remembering in chapter four.

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[55] Cf. Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998) p. 117.

[56] Juliet Mitchell, 2000, *Mad Men and Medusas: reclaiming hysteria and the effect of sibling relationships on the human condition* (London: Allen Lane) p. 286.

> For good or bad, a diluted influence of Freud has now permeated our age's conception of mind, of motive, action, and morality, as no psychological theory ever before has. It influences our attitudes to ourselves and others in ways that can be separated from our believing any particular theoretical assertions about causes of behaviour or psychical structure. It shapes the styles of explanation and attribution that we are prepared to understand.[57]

Andrew Morton's quote indicates that psychoanalysis frames the *kind* of explanation that is generally found acceptable in ways that lie outside the particulars of its theories. Whilst academics such as Pollock try to establish the ground of psychoanalytic criticism, monograph writers use psychoanalytic terminology in an unspecified and unexamined way We are all familiar with the characterisation of Bourgeois an artist of 'trauma', an artist of 'catharsis', and as having a special kind of access to the 'unconscious'. Deborah Wye, whose 1982 catalogue for the Museum of Modern Art New York remains a primary reference point for more recent writings, prioritises the psychological function of Bourgeois' with the following remarks:

> Bourgeois is articulate about the underlying psychological motivations of her art. In this regard, she is situated within the Surrealist tradition, which sees the exploration and expression of the unconscious as art's primary aim... The work of art serves a psychological function for Bourgeois, for she believes that making art is the process of giving tangible form to, and thus exorcising, the gripping, subconscious states of being that fill one with anxiety – a belief that places her in line with the expressionist tradition as well.
> She captures those exorcised feelings in her work and thereby animates it. The result, whether four inches long or forty feet long, is sculpture with an inner force resembling magnetic powers.[58]

This example illustrates a usage of generalised psychoanalytic terminology that expresses a common understanding of the nature of mind: an understanding which is reliant upon Freud's ideas and terminology (and Jung's contribution to Surrealist practice in New York). Judging from its prevalence, a post-Freudian, psychoanalytic account of mind is commonly seen to offer the fullest or, in some way, most satisfying form of 'explanation' for Bourgeois' practice. In other words, a general reader wanting an access behind the work is more satisfied with a psychic framework than an explanation in terms of, say, God's gift or genius. This implies that, due to its prevalence, psychoanalysis is not merely an analytical tool or hermeneutic but, as Frederick Jameson suggests, a total metaphysical system within which the interpretative act can make sense.[59]

As a metaphysical system psychoanalysis has distinct advantages. It is intuitive; we relate to ideas of unconscious processes, such as repression or sublimation, and psychoanalysis has provided people with a language and a set of metaphors that has allowed them to talk about irrational behaviours and anxieties that seem to have no voice. When it is asserted that Bourgeois' work provokes 'anxiety' or the 'uncanny' (or some similar term) in the viewer it is something that I, for one, can relate to. We are also reassured by the vast explanatory power of

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[57] A. Morton, 'Freudian Common-sense', in R. Wollheim and J. Hopkins (Eds.) *Philosophical essays on Freud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) pp. 60-74; quoted in Kathleen Wilkes, *Real People* (Oxford, Clarenden Press, 1993) p. 81.
[58] Deborah Wye, *Louise Bourgeois* (New York: Museum of Modern art New York, 1982) pp. 13-14.
[59] Frederick Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (London: Routledge, 1983).

psychoanalysis. Like the great world religions, ancient mythologies and political philosophies, psychoanalysis purports to explain everything, and in the face of a body of sculpture and statements that are profoundly challenging, this is comforting. It is, however, precisely this overarching perspective that obscures other kinds of explanation; perhaps this thesis asks: what has been repressed by the psychoanalytic metaphysic?

Such a reframing of my project only illustrates the power of psychoanalysis to absorb other perspectives into itself. My intention is rather to recognise that the psychoanalytic approach is an incredibly powerful framing device, that structures our thoughts, and to look beyond it. From my reading of both levels of writings, the monographs and the academic criticism, the metaphorical power of psychoanalytic imagery is crucial. From his anthropomorphised unconscious, containing the 'three tyrannical masters', the id, superego and external world[60] bordered by the 'guardians' of repression, Freud's model of mind contains powerful metaphors, the id-ego-superego structure implies an array of independent mini-minds acting outside awareness, whilst the process of repression, condensation and displacement are drawn from mechano-biological imagery. Indeed if we consider Anna Freud's summary of unconscious processes:

> We are dealing here with modes of expression that are closer to hallucination than they are to thinking in words; opposites become one and the same thing; temporal relationships and sequences are disregarded; logical thinking and consequential cause-effect connections are missing; emotions are easily displaced from their real object to another; mixed figures are formed as the result of condensation of several single figures. Altogether this mode of thinking characteristic of the unconscious strikes one as extraordinarily primitive; it is not different from what we assume to prevail in the infant before the acquisition of language.[61]

Then it seems to connect closely with Surrealist visual practice, and particularly Bourgeois' practice whose sculpture could be characterised as a methodical exploration of these processes: 'opposites become one and the same thing; temporal relationships and sequences are disregarded; logical thinking and consequential cause-effect connections are missing'. It seems to me that it is *not* the technical structures of psychoanalytic texts that interest art writers. No one discusses the details of how cathexes and anticathexes, impulses and condensations operate in Bourgeois' work.[62] There is rather a relationship between the *type* of enquiry that is psychoanalysis and the psychobiography of the art writing that suffuses Bourgeois' numerous monographs. It is the metaphorical structures that appeal to those who take psychoanalysis off the couch and into art writing.

The philosopher Mary Midgley in *Myths We Live By* considers how thought structures are inextricably linked to the metaphors with which they have been constructed and she refers to this as myth.[63] Myth has been a denigrated term in contemporary thought, calling to mind the

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[60] Freud, 'New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis', *Standard Edition* vol. 22, p. 77. Indeed the superego is even more anthropomorphic: 'during a melancholic attack his superego becomes over-severe, abuses the poor ego, humiliates it and ill-treats it, threatens it with direct punishments, reproaches it for actions in the remotest past.', p. 61

[61] Anna Freud, commentary on Sigmund Freud, *The Essentials of Psychoanalysis* (London: Penguin Books, 1991) p. 132.

[62] By contrast, Melanie Klein's theoretical framework is discussed in detail by Nixon.

[63] Mary Midgley, *Myths We Live By* (London, Routledge, 2003).

wilder moments of Jung's ideas and classical, cosmic tales. Midgley leaves Ovid behind and considers instead how we live our lives through numerous, often problematic, mythical structures. She writes:

> We are accustomed to think of myths as the opposite of science. But in fact they are a central part of it: the part that decides its significance in our lives. So we very much need to understand them.
> Myths are not lies. Nor are they detached stories. They are imaginative patterns, networks of powerful symbols that suggest particular ways of interpreting the world. They shape its meaning... At present when people become aware of this imagery they tend to think of it as merely as a surface dressing of isolated metaphors – as a kind of optional decorative paint that is sometimes added to ideas after they are formed, so as to make them clear to outsiders. But really such symbolism is an integral part of our thought structure. It does crucial work on all topics not just in a few supposedly marginal areas such as religion and emotion, where symbols are known to be at home, but throughout our thinking. The way in which we imagine the world determines what we think important, what we select for attention from the welter of facts that constantly flood in upon us.[64]

Myth then is not so much another term for 'ideology' (with its connotation of falsehood) but a term that denotes metaphorical structures in which ideas are imagined and disseminated. Midgley uses examples that are close to home, for instance how mechanistic imagery, such as that utilised by Freud, has given way to the microscopic, and how both sets of imagery rely on an atomistic approach where only the smallest parts are considered real: 'We feel that the large wholes we deal with in everyday life are mere appearances.'[65] Midgley's proposition is that far from abandoning notions of myth as illusory, with a kind of Barthesian idealism, they need to be examined and then if problematic they need to be consciously changed.[66] Midgley's formulation hopes to discard historically outdated myths (such as the Kantian subject) for more *useful*, mythically powerful structures of thought.

Whilst the term myth has been denigrated, for instance in Bal's work on Rembrandt, where she uses psychoanalysis to critique myth characterised in its Ovidian form, I am not alone in wanting to retrieve this term for art criticism and theory. Pollock notably applied Roland Barthes' semiotic formulation of myth to Vincente Minnelli's film, *Lust for Life* (1954).[67] Pollock's account is interesting in how she highlights the complexity of the machinations of myth: it is not a simple activity that 'the galleries are doing' or perhaps 'the artist', but a network of omissions, misreadings, simplifications, motivations and repetitions by all interested parties. Of course in Midgley's terms, Saussurean structuralism is itself as mythical structure

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[64] Ibid., pp. 1-2.
[65] Ibid., p. 1.
[66] In *Mythologies* Roland Barthes' aims to reveal myth as a mode of signification through semiotic analysis. For Barthes, myth does not hide meaning and therefore deceive, but distorts and deforms meaning by removing from the signifier of the Saussurean sign its historicity and presence, empting the sign to create a second, mythical, level of meaning. Myth is defined by its intention, inevitably tied to bourgeois propaganda, but that intention is made absent by the form of the myth and so myth appears falsely natural, 'depoliticized speech'. Myth is therefore necessarily duplicitous and for Barthes the only language able to resist myth is contemporary, modernist poetry – 'Zero Degree Writing' – such as Albert Camus. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1972) translated by Annette Lavers.
[67] Griselda Pollock, 'Crows, Blossoms and lust for Death – cinema and the myth of Van Gogh the modern artist' in Kodera Tsukasa (Ed.), *The Mythology of Vincent Van Gogh* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: TV Asahi / John Benjamin, 1993) pp. 217-239.

Myth is a term associated with notions of universality which, in a period where the theory invoked in art writing speaks of pluralism, relativism and specificity, seems problematic. Midgley's proposal, which is historically and culturally specific, concerning specific communities and specific structures of thought, reveals this association as only an apparent problem tied to envisioning myth as a cosmic and therefore universal entity. Midgley addresses the low context group[68] of contemporary British and western society but it is, nonetheless, a group sharing a certain conceptual framework, or lore. Midgley's philosophical approach is a long way from both the treatments of myth within art history and traditional conceptions of myth. The introduction to the *Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology* by Robert Graves may be taken to be an exemplar of the classical myth. Graves writes: 'Mythology is the study of whatever religious or heroic legends are so foreign to a student's experience that he cannot believe them to be true.' As we have seen, Midgley's philosophy can be seen to be broader and deeper; contending that myths are not lies and moving from the cosmic realm into the field of contemporary science. Midgley is concerned with how the conceptual frameworks by which we live and think are embodied by metaphor and imagery, 'in images, ideologies and half beliefs, in hopes and fears, in shame, pride and vanity.'[69] Midgley's myths are those structures that form truth.

As if in anticipation, Wittgenstein observed that Freud's writings possess everything that myths have:

> [Freud's ideas] have the attractions which mythological explanations have, explanations that say that this is all a repetition of something that has happened before. And when people do accept or adopt this, then certain things seem much clearer and easier for them.[70]

If considered as a mythical system, the psychoanalytic metaphysic can be repositioned alongside other prevalent mythologies and the folk wisdom that it so cleverly incorporates.[71] I suggested above that a psychoanalytic approach could be considered a metaphysical system. We can now see that this metaphysic is inextricably bound up with its imagery and mythical structure. This is the force of myth: to image powerful symbolic frameworks. Midgley writes:

> Big conceptual schemes like this work at every level in our lives. The conceptual framework is indeed its skeleton, but skeletons do not go about nude. Concepts are embodied in myths and fantasies, in images, ideologies and half-beliefs, in hopes and fears, in shame, pride and vanity. Like the great philosophers of the past who helped to shape our tradition we need to start taking notice of these.[72]

It is at this metaphorical, or rather mythical level, of battling forces and light in the darkness, that Freud and other versions of psychoanalysis are used by art writers.

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[68] Edward T. Hall in Toelken, *The Dynamics of Folklore* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979) p. 51.
[69] Midgley, p. 89.
[70] Wittgenstein in Cioffi (1973) p. 76.
[71] For instance, Tennyson's *The Princess* has long been used as an example of poetic knowledge or folk psychology for a condition that Freud termed 'strangulated affect':

> Home they bought her warrior dead:
> She nor swooned nor uttered cry;
> All her maidens, watching, said,
> 'She must weep or she will die.'

Alfred Lord Tennyson, 'The Princess', canto 5, quoted in Frank Cioffi (ed.), *Freud Modern Judgements* p. 5.
[72] Midgley, p. 89.

In a sense Freud, and the variations of psychoanalysis since, have developed a mythic structure to talk about a kind of thinking that is mythic itself: Freud writings bring together things that apparently cannot be reconciled (both in patient histories and in his mechano-biological and semiotic-anthropomorphic system) and is able to make people live with them. Freud is a great storyteller, exploiting the power of myth to elide and to bring incompatibles together. His aim becomes this struggle to rationalise, to overcome, to find the light in the dark of our psyche, through finding meaning in our unconscious. This search for rational explanations is a Herculean labour. It is a mythic structure of the proportions of the chariot of the sun itself, Helios - all seeing, all knowing and holding back the dark. This is not a conclusion that is alien to contemporary proponents of psychoanalysis. Bowie writes in *Psychoanalysis and the Future of Theory*:

> Those students who come to this future directed Freud in search of a stable theoretical view and an accompanying 'methodology' are bound to be disappointed. What they will find instead are a set of much less virtuous and useful things: a willingness to take risks, a gift for telling stories and making myths, and an ability to remain enraptured by works of art long after the business of explaining them has run its course.[73]

Creative writing, confabulating, myth making are useful ways to consider the power of Freud's writing. As a creative narrative, this thesis, stemming from my own practice as a sculptor, sets about telling some of the stories that the psychoanalytic metaphysic cannot and Midgley's understanding of myth is crucial to this project for it replaces truth and falsehood with usefulness.[74] Midgley does not suggest that any of the thought and metaphorical structures she describes are false, though they may be harmful to life or be preventing the resolution of certain ethical issues. Mary Midgley suggests that we need to change the myth in order to change reality and I hope that by reading outside the frame of psychoanalysis I can begin to offer new thought structures with which we may be able to approach the prevalent myths of Louise Bourgeois.

One of the strongest attempts to change the myth, in terms of our philosophy of mind and of unconsciousness, has come from Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*.[75] Like the evil child of psychoanalysis, *Anti-Oedipus* is a pop- subversion of the breathy, venereal seriousness of Lacan and the steam-powered excavations of Freud through a cyber-styled version of materialism whose initial propositions are startlingly radical. Abandoning the neurotic subject in

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[73] Bowie, p. 82.

[74] Midgley's position is prefigured by Wittgenstein's observations on psychoanalysis. He noted that there is no way of knowing that what is uncovered in analysis is truth. What the analyst meets is not simply a resistance but a delusion that makes life easier for the patient:

> He [Freud] speaks of overcoming resistance. One 'instance' is deluded by another 'instance'. The analyst is supposed to be stronger, able to combat and overcome the delusion of the instance [of resistance]. But there is no way of showing that the whole result of analysis may not be 'delusion'. It is something which people are inclined to accept and which makes it easier for them to go certain ways: it makes certain ways of behaving and thinking natural for them. They have given up one way of thinking and adopted another.
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> Although one may discover in the course of it various things about oneself, one must have a very strong and keen and persistent criticism in order to recognise and see through the mythology that is offered or imposed on one. There is an inducement to say, 'Yes, of course, it must be like that.' A very powerful mythology.

Wittgenstein in Cioffi (1973) p. 86.

[75] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus – Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Athlone Press, 1984).

favour of the schizophrenic, Deleuze and Guattari overturn a century's work on the talking cure and the attempt to cohere the ego. In fact the ego is their enemy.

Like all materialist theories, *Anti-Oedipus* is unable to account for the specific contents of mental or social life, but its contribution to the philosophy of mind lies elsewhere. The contention of Deleuze and Guattari is that it is a mistake to look for meaning in the unconscious because it is not a 'theater', as implied by Freud's 'primal scenes', but operates more like a machine. Critical of Freud's reduction of mental life to the poles of the oedipal triangle, Deleuze and Guattari reduce everything internal, external, of man and not of man, to the producer-product relationship.

> Ever since birth, his crib, his mother's breast, her nipple, his bowel movements are desiring machines connected to parts of his body.[76]

Disembodied desiring machines come into contact with the infant, not parts or representatives of a parent's body. The distinctions of body–mind, nature–culture, interior mental–exterior material, all dissipate into desiring machines (pictured as Kleinian part-objects) that discharge or draw off 'flow', called 'hylé' (the primordial matter of the universe). The metaphorical structure of flow is bodily – spittle, sperm, shit and urine – but within the text hylé is presented as light and quick, like electricity. There is no viscerality in Deleuze and Guattari's text, no mess, no spills, no wiping, and their curiously disembodied view of bodies is one of their flaws. There is an almost mystical quality to Deleuze and Guattari's proposals, as hard-headed and mechanistically Marxist as they appear. Theirs is a creative philosophy that creates a new mythology surrounded with the coloured aura of energy and motion.

Deleuze and Guattari contend that the unconscious is a factory, a workshop, where desiring machines come into contact and break apart, drawing off flow and producing desiring production.[77] If the unconscious is a factory, one's attention has to shift to the products and Bourgeois' phrase, 'the unconscious is my friend', becomes a reference to creative energy itself. What Deleuze and Guattari offer is the possibility to abandon the search for meaning in the unconscious it is a profound challenge to the perceived need to interpret the unconscious that is at the heart of the psychoanalytic project. Whilst ironically updating Freud's coal-powered metaphors with something of a silicone-chip generation, Deleuze and Guattari's unconscious-as-factory is a new thought structure that is, in one sense, a return to an acceptance of unconscious processes as simply being there: sleep on it and you might resolve it in the morning.

It is with this awareness of thought structures as inextricably bound up with the imagery in which they are imagined and conveyed, that I set aside psychoanalysis for the purposes of this thesis. Excellent work has been done in interpreting Bourgeois' symbols, (Meyer, Somers et al), which it is not necessary for me to repeat. To posit the unconscious as a machine, or as something we can understand in a non-theoretical and experiential way as something that works *for* us – that we sleep upon and does not require analysis – may be enough to allow us to look beyond

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[76] Deleuze and Guattari (1984) p. 47.

[77] Interestingly, desiring production can itself be social, real and tangible; it is not restricted to the inner realm.

the frame of psychoanalytic interpretation when seeing Bourgeois' work and so open a space for other narratives to emerge, narratives that have been obscured by the dominant discourse on Bourgeois.

Bourgeois Myths

Midgley's philosophy of myth has direct applications for Louise Bourgeois studies. the collapsing of the character and position of Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz onto Bourgeois and her practice in Jerry Gorovoy and Danielle Tilkin's essay *There's no Place Like Home,* is not merely an analogy, but by identifying Bourgeois' practice *as* Dorothy's journey (or quest) and using Dorothy's script to speak for Bourgeois: 'the walls begin to shake, the house to quake', the writers determine *how* we think about Bourgeois and her work.[78] In this instance, portrayed as forever clicking her heels and trying to get home, Bourgeois is metaphorically removed from the historical reality in which she practices and makes her living and whisked into the kodacolor world of Hollywood.

This thesis is alert to such mythical constructions, which do not only emerge from the monograph and critical levels of writing but have been developed, strategically, by Bourgeois. Bourgeois' strategies are intertwined; her studio strategies, which I discuss in chapter two, link to her pragmatic strategies of business: for instance, her move from materials chosen for their specificity to ones that are permanent, and saleable. Bourgeois and the art world machine around her have also developed strategies of narrative myth that have created the foreclosed discourse of personal psychic trauma and recovery that dominates the contemporary discourse. I am suggesting that the individual psychic narratives, tied to certain sculptures, such as the dismemberment and devouring of the father to *The Destruction of the Father* (1974), or the ambivalent feelings of, successively, hate towards her mother, then guilt and then self-hate tied to *She Fox*, and others, all operate on a mythical level. As Midgley says, myths are not lies, nor are they detached stories: they are imaginative patterns, networks of powerful symbols that suggest particular ways of interpreting the world. By suggesting that Bourgeois' anecdotes and self-narrations operate as myth, I am not trying to undermine their status as possibly real events, memories or beliefs. In chapter two I show how Bourgeois' studio acts mythically to map an experience of her sculpture that has been absorbed into curatorship.

Bourgeois' recently published volume of writings and interviews, *Destruction of the father Reconstruction of the father*, illustrates a kind of mythmaking by omission. Inserted at various points in the volume are selections from Bourgeois' diaries. They are remarkably selective. Not only are they grouped into sections that omit certain years - 1945-9, 1954-60, 1979-81 - but those that are included are vague: there are, for instance, six short paragraphs dated '1940s' (presumably 1940-4). The selections are unduly thin on the ground: for example, fifteen short entries cover the 19 years 1960-79. There are no dated entries for the years 1961-5, 1967-71, or 1976-8. The inclusions are so few and so short that it begs the questions of why these rare gems were picked out and why the rest of her diary entries were discarded. What is it that

[78] Jerry Gorovoy and Danielle Tilkin, 'There's no Place like Home' in *Louise Bourgeois, Memory and Architecture* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 2000) pp. 15-17, quote p. 16.

these sentences say that the rest don't, or what is it that these selections omit that has caused their inclusion? The diary entries do not significantly add to or change the dominant narrative of the *Writings* volume, continuing Bourgeois' characterisation as overpowered by the intensity of her emotions[79] and her memories.[80] Is this why these were included? Is it because they do not alter the dominant narrative of the volume?

Another omission reveals the mythmaking of the standard version 'Louise Bourgeois'. We are familiar with the narratives that tie specific sculptures or deeper motivations for practice to Bourgeois' biography and her often traumatic memories of childhood: the Sadie story, the dominating and womanizing father, the long-suffering and ill mother and so forth. These are used to support a psychobiographical narrative and the wider post-Freudian framework in which Bourgeois and her gallery present her work. When interviewed by Deborah Wye in 1979 as Wye was preparing research for the MoMA retrospective that was to follow, Bourgeois was asked about the painting *Natural History* (1944). Her reply indicated a time before the painting was made, when she feared she could not have children:

> That was at a time when I thought I couldn't have any children, so I proved to myself that I had the right to have a child. I was complete. I was not a mediated man, I was a woman. All the parts show the plant is going to procreate... When I adopted Michel, it meant I was not able to procreate. And it was a trauma... Then I did something else. I didn't stay on that subject. I found another subject. The anxiety was gone. It is the case of the hysterical woman who cannot procreate because she is hysterical. It is a standard case. The fear of not having children made me hysterical, it made me emotionally upset. This [Natural History] is tangible proof that I am a normal person.[81]

Natural History is framed as a positive symbol of overcoming of this profound anxiety and self-doubt. Deborah Wye did not include this recollection in her landmark 1982 catalogue. It was an anxiety so intense that it caused Louise and Robert to adopt a child to make their family: a very tangible and real response. It is a story Bourgeois has repeated on several occasions, notably in her interview with Alain Krill (1989), where she describes a general sexual and erotic revulsion, and her relief at Robert's 'puritanism.'[82] Again in an interview with Jennifer Dalsimer (1986)[83] Bourgeois discussed the sculpture *Fallen Woman* (1981), a shining, smooth, black marble club topped with a stylised female head, linking it to her sexuality:

> JD: What does that mean fallen?
> LB: Fallen, that means that she is not up to what was expected of her.
> JD: In what areas of your life?
> LB: In sexual terms. You see.
> JD: Really?
> LB: Sometimes, yes.
> JD: Why do you think you would have been fallen in sexual terms?

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[79] '5 January 1960. Aggressiveness and guilt – back and forth – rather, rage and guilt – descending progression where the rage against the other turns itself on me', Bourgeois (1998) p. 70.
[80] '24, July 1973. I did not deserve to be loved so that I turned people against me. I did not deserve to be lovable; to be lovable means to be killed, to be fucked means to be killed.' Bourgeois (1998) p. 70. A note indicates that 'they' were Louise's sister and a neighbour fondling, and the blood was menstrual.
[81] Bourgeois (1998) p. 125.
[82] Ibid., pp. 176-185.
[83] Louise Bourgeois interviewed by Jennifer Dalsimer, 4 September 1986, gift of Jennifer Dalsimer, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institutions. My own transcription.

> LB: If I had been more sexy, my... I would have been a better wife. Sexually inadequate. But all these are relative you understand?[84]

These examples evidence a profound anxiety and fear, tied to sexuality and femininity, which the dominant account would suggest that Bourgeois revisits and exorcises through her art but that the dominant account chooses to overlook. My purpose is not to form an analysis of Bourgeois' intimate anxieties nor to provide further grist for the mill of psychobiography, but to ask questions. If Bourgeois' writings and interviews over many decades are peppered with references to these events and fears, then why are they so regularly omitted from the dominant psychobiographical account when the 'Sadie' story and other similar narratives have become foundation narratives in that account?

There is, to my mind, something specific about this idea of one's own sexual inadequacy, in appearance, performance and procreativity, which has caused its absence. Wye did not use either this narrative of inadequacy and sterility or the 'Sadie' story in her 1982 catalogue, framing Bourgeois' sculptures instead as universalizing forms for her unprinted personal motives. Wye and Rubin firmly entrenched the centrality of the psychic and the biographical in this classic catalogue, whilst the specifics of the biographical stories were already known on the New York scene (specifically through her Artforum project, *Child Abuse* (1982), an earlier article in *Centerpoint* (1980) and through a slide talk given by Bourgeois in the approach to her retrospective). Perhaps it is because Bourgeois' references to her sexuality narrate a specifically female or sexual fear. Perhaps it is because, like the fear of impotence, this narrative is about a loss that threatens one's subjectivity *through* one's sexuality. Her narrative describes fearing not being female, being a 'mediated man', and failing at femaleness' hidden test. The Cartesian subject, upon which the psychobiographical account is premised, can grapple to itself and rail against those injustices imposed from outside (such as one's parents' hypocrisy), but perhaps the fears of this narrative – of not being a full woman – present too strong a challenge to Cartesian subjectivity. Wye writes, 'by the time of her second solo show... in 1947, Bourgeois's subconscious personal motivations had begun to emerge in her imagery'; there is no suggestion in Wye's text that these 'motivations' might be very, very conscious indeed.[85] The kinds of publishable explanations of Bourgeois' pieces become quietly, mythically interpreted, and the difficult narrative of conscious anxiety is translated into a palatable, post-Freudian unconscious motivation. My interest in this particular narrative is in how its omission reveals the boundaries of the psychobiographic frame, a mythology threatened by the extreme intimacy of this tale and the question of subjectivity it reveals.

This narrative raises the question of subjectivity and as my work has progressed, the model of identity – established by Immanuel Kant's transcendental 'I', Descartes' dualism and cemented by the Freudian imperative that childhood forms the character and nature of mental life which is then stable, autonomous and unchanging – has become to seem problematic. One of my concerns has been with the gap in time between the making of Bourgeois' works and the revelation of her personal narratives that now accompany them. As we shall see, the gap has

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[84] Bourgeois and Dalsimer, ibid.
[85] Wye (1982) p. 17.

gradually closed until by 2000, these two procedures, making and describing, have switched position and Bourgeois' statement for her Tate installation in 2000 anticipated the sculptures before they were made. The notion of a stable, consistent and continuous selfhood cannot account fully for Bourgeois' contrary and even contradictory positions without excluding one portion or other and designating them as errors or lies. These two problems of time-lag and of contradictoriness led me towards contemporary feminist philosophy, where innovative thinkers are challenging the dominant thought structures, the mythical models of identity, ontology and metaphysics with which we normally think about subjectivity.

From this literature, the work of Christine Battersby has been particularly useful. Battersby's work aims to reformulate our notion of identity currently based upon a male norm to become based instead upon a female norm. The importance of this move is that the capacity of the female body for birth is a profound challenge to identity as autonomous and continuous, which Battersby characterises as dominating discussions of identity since Kant's transcendental self which relates the phenomenal of awareness to the noumenal of being in-itself. This is because birth and maternity registers the conjoined-ness and splitting of two identities a gradual way, and as infant or carer the subject is profoundly tied to power dependencies. So regarding birth, there is no sharp division between self and other in natality, the other emerges from the embodied self such that two selves emerge not simply one dissolving into the other. Post structuralist though sees the self emerging from the exclusion or abjection of the other but instead out of intersecting force-fields, self and other emerge. This moves Battersby towards a notion of self that contradicts the Aristotelian permanent and unchanging substance that she argues persists in Kant's thought, the self is not a thing in a dependent and non-autonomous conception, it is more like an event that is born. This does not mean that there is no way of talking about persistence of the self over time, and Battersby elaborates a system for 'scoring' identity and patterns of experience and learning into this notion of a constantly changing self, which I discuss in chapter three. Crucially, Battersby's subject is fleshy, she writes: 'what matters to the arguments in this book is that I am concerned with embodied subjects, not with 'souls', 'spirits' or an immaterial 'I' that is only lodged in the flesh'[86] and thus she tries to reform the deeply immaterial thought structure of Deleuze and Guattari's body without organs.

The subject Battersby outlines then is of *becoming* not of being, it is more like an event that is born, a Kierkegaardian formulation that Battersby sums up as 'a workshop of possibilities'. Though elaborated in chapter three in relation to a specific set of images and interview evidence; this conception of subjectivity as fluid, changing and emergent, runs throughout this project. It forces the separation of each chapter into disparate excerpts form a long and complex career and their lack of overlap and it presses to the fore the question of Bourgeois' plethora of statements as objects of study – as you have seen above. Most importantly, the notion of subjectivity as in constant change, which I have taken from Battersby permits the speculation I make about Bourgeois' subject position now, in her nineties, of chapter four. This chapter could not have been written with a conception of the self that required autonomy and consistency for such a position would only have permitted me to discuss Bourgeois' work in

[86] Christine Battersby, *The Phenomenal Woman* (Polity Press, 1998) p. 9

terms of loss of faculties, and Bourgeois' current work is far more interesting than such a limited frame permits.

Alongside Midgley and Battersby, I should also mention Michael Baxandall, whose writings I deeply respect. Baxandall's place in this thesis is more implicit than explicit, though his concentration upon the social and strategic relationships between artists begins my first chapter as he changes the myth of influence by providing a new model and metaphor for artistic positioning and the action of influence. Baxandall's work provides a model of approaching the art object that is closely tied to that thing, to looking at it and dwelling upon it, and unearthing the circumstances of its making. I think this is best illustrated in his *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*[87] which draws together a number of sculptures by provenance and material[88] but whose makers are often little known and explores the historical realities of their making and sale. In the more recent *Patterns of Intention*, Baxandall sets out his method as approaching objects 'as solutions to problems in situations'[89] which demands that the historical circumstances surrounding the object be presented as well as the aesthetic debates in which the artist might have been engaged and the activities of the market. Baxandall redefines the notion of intentionality as not an attempt to describe the mental-life of the maker but rather as the recognition of the assumption that the maker acted intentionally in a given situation. Thus he includes in his social (but not Marxist) history, the patterns of continuity and change that distinguishes visual practice over a career as an artist responds to their own earlier work without the need to suppose the contents of their mental-life and, more importantly, the complex effects of the art market (in Baxandall's terms: *troc*). It is with this awareness of the artwork as a historical object, made as a solution to a problem in a particular situation that I approach Bourgeois' work and hence my concern not only to present Bourgeois' historical situation, particularly evident in chapter one, but also my desire to make clear Bourgeois' strategies, both in her studio and in her career. For these go some way to describing both the problems Bourgeois tackles in her studio and the solutions she settles upon.

The Chapters

My project is a strategic analysis, embracing whatever is necessary in order to map Bourgeois's interventions, engagements and battles in a way which I hope is empowering to a sculptor whose agency is depleted by the continued focus on the psyche and the repetitious narratives of exorcism and trauma in the monographs' dominant account. Each chapter takes as its matter a sample of work from a particular period in time and brings to it the methodologies outlined here. This allows me to interrogate the assumptions of the dominant discourse of the monographs that persist across her career and also to consider issues that emerge in particular decades or that have been prevalent in relation to certain bodies of work. Hence, I hope that this thesis retains an awareness of the historical moments that Bourgeois' career spans, specificities that do not interest the monographs on Bourgeois.

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[87] Baxandall, Michael, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980)

[88] Though more recent work has suggested that some of the sculptures Baxandall considers are not in fact made of Limewood.

Thus, chapter one, *Complete Shutdown: Strategies of Engagement*, is 'set' in the 1940s and looks at the beginnings of Bourgeois' sculptural career in relation to the primary pairing of issues: 'isolation' and 'influence'. I argue against the term influence proposing instead, after Baxandall, that we consider Bourgeois' work and career in terms of engagements, strategies and tactics. One of Bourgeois' prime engagements is with the figure of Picasso through which Bourgeois explores and it is in this encounter that the seeds of Bourgeois' sculptural modernism are established. I begin to establish the strategies which Bourgeois used to establish her profile and establish her practice. I explore Bourgeois' connections with Surrealism finding that she shared an American war-time encounter with fractured, disparate figures at the twilight of the movement. I examine Bourgeois' connections and separations from the artists of her milieu who went on to become known as the New York School. Bourgeois' early work, discussed now in terms of its isolation and her 'ploughing her own furrow' (Rubin), turns out to be deeply engaged with the ideas and debates of the time. This is the beginning of a sequence of timely changes (formal objects, latex figuration, performances, feminism, personal anecdotes and installation) that evidence Bourgeois' closeness to her milieu. I find that Bourgeois is anything but 'isolated' in her social, personal and professional life, if the concept is taken literally. If the term has any validity, is it not in its implication of aloneness but that it references, as a badge of Bourgeois' membership, the loose but shared existential philosophy of the New York School.

Chapter two, *Shop Talk: Developing Strategies of Practice*, moves on to the 1960s and takes as its matter Bourgeois' poured, cast and constructed sculptures of this decade. My methodology here is a close analysis of the sculptures themselves, which leads to an understanding of Bourgeois' studio practice and the strategies of making from which they emerged. This new awareness of Bourgeois' studio habits, I argue, has profound implications for the way in which we understand the curatorial and critical process. This is a chapter of strategies, and alongside tracing Bourgeois' studio habits I question the relationship between the primary objects of study (the art objects) and the secondary ones (that would be called context), for what I see in Bourgeois' practice is a strategic incorporation of those secondary objects into her sculptural practice. I suggest that, rather than an explanatory mode, her language is, potentially-always and actually-often, a sculptural material that she moulds to effect, to fit, to form. The chapter explores Bourgeois' studio strategies, her practices of making as an alternative site for meaning in her work and as a narrative obscured by the dominant discourse of the psyche in the monographs and psychoanalytic criticism. I conclude by examining the position that Bourgeois' studio has in text and in curatorship, whilst invisible in the dominant discourse it is clearly important as a site of meaning within that discourse. Implicit in this chapter is the position that Bourgeois' turn to permanent and saleable materials at the end of the decade follows both her need to survive economically and her earlier location within sculptural modernism from chapter one. This position argues against the common conception that Bourgeois anticipates the postmodern turn although this argument is in itself beyond the scope of this thesis.

Chapter three, *Bourgeois Truth: Strategies in Interviews and Images*, is 'set' in the 1970s looked back upon from the 1980s. It continues my investigation into Bourgeois' words by making a

[89] Baxandall, Michael, *Patterns of Intention* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985) p. 35.

close study of one of her interviews where she reread her involvement with the feminist arts movement from the perspective of 1986. This reveals her interventions within the interview as strategic and 'pseudo-stabile' (Bal); her narratives and statements exhibit fluidity by both anchoring her words and allowing her to shift her position. I consider the problematic relationship that Bourgeois has to feminism through her involvement with the 1970s feminist arts movement and introduce the importance of Bourgeois historicizing and remembering her past with current, present purpose and intention. I find that her shifting position in between the women's movement and the mainstream arts movement is a strategic 'in-between' and could itself be revealing of how Bourgeois understands subjectivity. This leads towards an examination of what kind of subject position is proposed in Bourgeois' self images, her interviews and her *Cells*. I conclude by pointing towards a notion of subjectivity that allows for Bourgeois' strategic shifting in interview and career positioning: a fluid evolving and changing subjecthood. This is a fluid and emerging subject, as proposed by Christine Battersby, which is itself indebted to the existential and phenomenal philosophy that formed a part of the shared approach of the New York School. It is a philosophy that allows us to reposition Bourgeois' objects and statements in a new and challenging way: as a radical autobiography that is not recording a pre-existent self, but that forges and makes temporary subject positions, creating new pasts and futures, in the act of making. Taken together, a theoretical fluid and emergent subject and a set of archive evidence that shows Bourgeois' shifting in her interviews and blending her self-image with her sculptural practice in her photographs, the possibility is opened that the past of Bourgeois a creation of the present.

Chapter four: *Vanishing Memory: Reflecting Upon the Present and the Past*, takes forward the idea of emerging and fluid subject to consider Bourgeois' changing subjectivity now. The third chapter considered memory philosophically as a process contributing to an emerging, subject. This chapter considers memory through the medical and therapeutic studies on ageing. I consider two recent exhibitions, Bourgeois' installation at the Tate Modern (2000) and *Stitches in Time* (Dublin and Edinburgh, 2004) and ask that age be theorised positively. I consider Bourgeois' work in terms of her elderly position, looking back on her life, taking stock and sorting through a lifetime's belongings. Recognizing that memory function changes with very old age I question what is lost and what made present to Bourgeois in her frail state. Read through ageing Bourgeois' newest works and her large scale installations can be seen to allude to her frailty and changing subjectivity. I examine how these changes are disguised and elided through the promotion and support networks around Bourgeois. Perhaps Bourgeois' work should be better considered not in terms of the psyche but as a sculpture *of* ageing, bringing ageing out of the negative silence it inhabits and narrating its changes in front of the world.

1 Complete Shutdown: Strategies of Engagement

Louise Bourgeois wrote to her friend and co-student at the Académie de la Grand-Chaumière, Colette Richarme, from on board the *Aurania* in 1938. Newly wed at twenty-seven but separated from her husband just a week after their marriage, she was sailing across the Atlantic to join him. Her mind was full of the painters that interested her and the books she was reading on Seurat, Friesz, Dufy, Derain, Picasso: the new masters. Although the Second World War is imminent and the political situation in her native France is deteriorating, she writes instead of her private fears:

> What has distressed me for a long time is the difficulty I have in working. Every time I pick up a brush, it causes an internal storm. It seems as if the more I learn, and the more my sensibility asserts itself, the more my inspiration disappears. The more I have to say, the less I can speak.[1]

Bourgeois is writing here of a loss of visual language, a profound speechlessness that stems from her steeping herself in modern art and ideas – a process perhaps made more intense by the meeting of minds with new husband, art historian Robert Goldwater. Here, Bourgeois' speechlessness, her 'internal storm', meets the agitated motion of her personal life: she was alone, at sea, and unable to take comfort in her marriage, her family, or in her art. It is a moment of personal transition, physical journey and creative crisis.

What language or metaphor is adequate to understand this moment in Bourgeois' development? Could this be a flash of Bloom's 'anxiety of influence': Bourgeois' School of Paris precursors inspiring an ambivalence and anxiety that have brought about this speechlessness and that will lead to the poetic misprision, the deep misreading, from which her own work, and a new anxiety of making, will emerge?[2] Bourgeois' self-narration has always bound her visual work closely with her personal life and the volatile intimacies of the family. As we have seen, her claims are interpreted in a narrow psychobiographical mode as William Rubin's introduction to Deborah Wye's Museum of Modern Art catalogue (1982) illustrates:

> Today virtually everybody is a 'loner', doing his or her own thing, largely because of the dearth of those towering figures whose work, in more normal, less transitional periods, acts as a magnet for lesser artists... Louise Bourgeois is a loner of another order, whose bona fides goes back four decades to a period when maintaining a wholly individual profile in the face of Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, David Smith et alia involved an immense force of artistic and personal character. Thus a kind of quiet inner heroism led Louise Bourgeois to observe artistic developments of the times from close up, but to stand apart from them in her own work... By the force of her personality, Bourgeois continues to maintain her own distinctive vocabulary, avoiding the rhetoric of the times, creating works of great poetic resonance.[3]

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[1] Louise Bourgeois, *Louise Bourgeois – Destruction of the Father Reconstruction of the Father – Writings and Interviews 1923-1997* (London: Violette Editions, 1998) pp. 31-2.
[2] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997).
[3] William Rubin, 'Foreword', in Deborah Wye, *Louise Bourgeois* (New York, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1982) p. 11. This statement is shortened from his earlier, 'Some Reflections Prompted by The

Poor Louise; even as Rubin celebrates her 'inner heroism' he implies that her prominence is due to the lack of towering figures that in a 'normal period' he would expect to find. This chapter will argue against this kind of writing (which persists despite the excellent critical work now being done), against Bourgeois as a loner and against the contrast Rubin makes between Bourgeois' individualism and the 'et alia' of the New York School.

It is my contention that the historical conditions of the emergence of Bourgeois' practice need to be addressed more seriously in order to challenge the idea of her as a unique and a-historical loner that dominates the discourse of the monographs.[4] This is an idea dependent upon Bourgeois' self-narration of standing apart from the changing fashions of art. The two poles that traditionally frame art historical discussion are summarised in the question: is he a genius or a man of his time? If the timelessness of the dominant narrative of Bourgeois' practice implies genius, then this chapter will place her in her time. Similarly, the language of 'influence', primarily in this case the 'influence' of Surrealism, is problematic. 'Influence' suggests the slow, perpetual planetary motions and the draw of gravity as artistic magnitudes exert pull in the silent space of creativity. 'Influence' is a classic example of a metaphorical, mythical, structure that shapes our thoughts and is used in relation to Bourgeois as an unquestioned term.

Michael Baxandall writes that influence is the 'curse' of art history 'because of its wrong-headed grammatical prejudice about who is the agent and who the patient.'[5] By this he means that influence suggests the former artist, usually dead, has somehow acted upon the later artist. Baxandall points out that it is the later artist who is active and indeed acts upon the former. His example is Cézanne's 'influence' upon Picasso. It becomes clear that Picasso has fundamentally altered how we *see* and understand Cézanne's work; by bringing out strands and developing them, Picasso's work shifts Cézanne into a more central place in the tradition of European painting and ensures that we now see Cézanne 'partly diffracted through Picasso's idiosyncratic reading.'[6] Importantly, the language of 'influence' that makes Picasso (and Bourgeois) appear passive actually prevents us from differentiating the activities of these artists. Phrases such as 'draw on', 'adapt', 'misunderstand', 'refer to', 'copy', 'address', 'paraphrase', 'absorb', 'parody', 'resist' and 'transform' are rich descriptions which are no longer available if 'influence' is used. Beyond these objections, Baxandall notes that 'influence' actually evades the difficulties of attempting to describe causal relations for art objects by implying a simple explanation:

> If x [e.g. Cézanne] is the sort of fact that acts on people, there seems to be no pressing need to ask why y [e.g. Picasso] was acted upon: the implication is that x simply is that kind of fact – 'influential.'[7]

Recent Work of Louise Bourgeois' *Art International* (April, 1969). Both articles speak of a dearth of towering figures that allows the smaller artist to shine, and frame Bourgeois' work as influenced by Surrealism.

[4] Cf. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London and New York, Routledge, 1989).

[5] Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1985) p. 58-9.

[6] Ibid., p. 61. We might draw a parallel here with Bal's preposterous history which calls upon the present day artist 'to prefigure rather than to follow 'Narrative Inside Out, Louise Bourgeois' Spider as Theoretical Object' *Oxford Art Journal* (22, no. 2, 1999) pp. 101-26.

[7] Ibid., p. 59.

For Baxandall then, 'influence' pretends to answer the difficulties of forming historical explanations for art objects by positing influencing-type-things.

Baxandall proposes instead a new metaphorical structure that places the intentioned actions of the later artist centrally; replacing the sphere of influence or simple causal contact of 'influence' with a complex field of possibilities, which include materials, skills, concepts, available artists and their ideas, the interests of the market and so forth. Baxandall suggests one could picture an artist moving like a billiard ball across a ball-filled baize, contacting, or ricocheting off another 'ball' in the field. By doing so he repositions the whole field, changing the relations of other 'balls' to each other (Cézanne, African art or Picasso's dealer perhaps), and making some more or less available to him in his new position after each reference or contact. Baxandall writes, 'arts are positional games and each time an artist is influenced, he rewrites his art's history a little.'[8] Baxandall's analysis debunks the overpowering presence of 'influence' and reaffirms the importance of the actions and decisions of the 'influenced' artist.

The concentration on Bourgeois' biography apparently dissolves the differences between artist and artwork into a simple explanatory narrative that elides and disguises both the historical specificities of production and viewing and the problems of expression claims attached to work, which remain unquestioned and 'influence' has been a key tool in this process. Bourgeois' insistence upon grounding her work in her family as subject, theme and motivation, necessitates (counter-intuitively) the exploration of her historical position and demands that we reckon with Bourgeois' activity in the positional game of art. By recognizing Bourgeois' active self-positioning, her references, contacts, and engagements with her milieu, it may be possible to write against her timeless, artistically isolated, a-historicism.

By studying Bourgeois' early career I hope to show that it is the connections to those around her and *not* her isolation from her peers that has formed the characteristics of Bourgeois' sculpture. The impression of uniqueness is a misinterpretation arising from our historical distance from the events of the 1940s which were crucial to the formation of Bourgeois distinctive sculptural procedures. It will be necessary to outline aspects of the New York art scene after the Second World War, out of which came Abstract Expressionism, but this shall be kept to a minimum. Where I see Bourgeois' experience as being the same as that of her contemporaries and so not relevant to the emergence of her own distinctive voice, for example the de-politicisation of that generation of artists during and after the war that Guilbaut describes in *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* then such experience must, of necessity, remain outside the scope of this paper.[9] My aim is not to write another history of that era but rather to weave a narrative of Bourgeois within, not apart from her milieu.

In chapters two and three, I problematize the use of Bourgeois' statements as evidence. Here, I do use Bourgeois' self-narration. I differentiate between Bourgeois' correspondence with Colette Richarme of the 1930s and those interviews Bourgeois gives once her position is established (between twenty and fifty years later) when she is recalling her work with her

[8] Ibid., p. 60.

present and future career in mind. Her early letters are written with an openness that disappears in her later, wilier, professional life and this source is less drawn in to both the circular creative process[10] she develops as a mature artist and by the professional circumstances that enable her to write in a more strategic mode. It is hard to place Bourgeois' movements in these years outside the evidence of her own archive and so to build any kind of picture of her early years one simply *has* to use her self-narratives of this period. This does not undermine my project; for this chapter is biography against itself, writing Bourgeois into her milieu using the same archive and the same interviews as those who insist on extracting her from her historical moment.

Atlantic Crossing

Bourgeois' Atlantic crossing marks a moment of cleavage, a difficult journey of liberty and parting from her family and from those surfaces in which she had seen her hopes and aspirations reflected. It is clear that Louise Bourgeois, Mrs Goldwater in her private life, did not envision this as a permanent emigration, for she had programmed her gallery within the family town house on Rue Saint-Germain to run for the nine months she expected to be away. She and Robert returned to France for three months in 1939 during the university summer recess and Louise studied, painted and exhibited with the Ranson Group (September 1939). The Second World War then interceded, cutting her off from news and family and changing everyone and everything with its enduring blackness, forcing Bourgeois to cleave to the alien country she needed to make home. It was not until 1950 that the Goldwater family were able to visit France again and a year later Bourgeois' emigration became permanent: she took United States citizenship. Any hopes for continuity with her life in France were gone: even the house at Choisy le Roi no longer existed.

Bourgeois escaped the memory of her dead mother and the emotional turbulence of her father by marrying, 'I said I would marry an Englishman or anybody who would take me out of the country' she recalls in 1966.[11] Bourgeois' letter from the *Aurania* continues:

> Fortunately in New York, I shall be joining artistic circles. Othon Friesz is there at the moment, so is Fernand Léger. Chirico and Salvador Dalí are Robert's friends and will be in our house regularly. Picasso and André Breton will also be there.' These names may not mean much to you, because they are all much more "avant-garde" than Brayer {their tutor at the Académie de la Grand Chaumière}. Breton, for example, wrote the Surrealist Manifesto, and I know that this will make you laugh.[12]

Bourgeois is keen to impress her painter friend (isolated in the French provinces) with her cosmopolitan circle. Bourgeois imagines that she will be at the centre of the 'avant-garde': where art and ideas are at their most challenging and, perhaps, challenging her own dinner

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[9] Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* (Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1983) trans. Arthur Goldhammer.

[10] I argue in chapter three that Bourgeois is in some sense creating her past through the activity of an autobiographical practice. Remembering, I argue, fixes one past (from a number of possible pasts) for the purposes of the present and intentions for the future. In this way, a subject is constantly in flux, emergent and 'the past' is a temporally situated fixing of possible pasts.

[11] Unpublished interview with John Jones (March 12, 1966).

[12] Bourgeois (1998) p. 32.

guests. Bourgeois has high hopes here, and the consequences and realities she finds in New York result in both her deep unhappiness and her slow maturity from eager and competitive art student into the anxious and combative sculptor that emerges for her first solo show eleven years later.

Let us look briefly at what Bourgeois left behind. Born in Paris, Bourgeois knew the city well when she began to study mathematics at the Sorbonne in 1932. She quickly abandoned this for art. Her first tutor was Paul Colin who produced Art Deco style posters for the theatre. In the next six years Bourgeois combined work and study, obtaining her degree in art history at the École du Louvre,[13] gaining experience in various techniques through the École des Beaux Arts and Académie de la Grand Chaumière, where she studied sculpture techniques with Wlérick and also sketching, ceramics and anatomy. She nurtured an interest in the private Ateliers, studying with and working for various artists (including Colarossi, Lhote, Gromaire, Léger and Friesz), using her English language skills to translate in exchange for her tuition. Shortly before meeting Robert Goldwater, Bourgeois began to deal in prints and contemporary drawings, converting a part of the family house into a small gallery. Her letters show that she stopped painting at this time, feeling unable to express her intentions. Dealing allowed her to make a transition from student to professional life, maintain her circulation and contacts without facing this crisis in her practice.

In crossing the Atlantic, Bourgeois left behind her family, her studies and her nascent business but she carried with her the crisis of expression that became a silence that was internalised compounded by her experience of alienation in America. Although famously loquacious, Bourgeois rarely mentions Paris itself or the France that lay beyond the bounds of her family's properties and the events of this time remain seemingly confused in the literature. This is because Bourgeois' work at the Louvre or for Léger, for instance, slips in to our expectations of her artistic apprenticeship as the biographical mode of art history. All her experiences, from hiring the models at the Grand Chaumière and so encountering prostitutes for the first time to working at the Louvre and seeing limbless First World War veterans, or the advice of her tutors, are grist to the art historians' mill. The Exposition Internationale of 1937, the troubled political situation before the War, the fashion for jazz and 'primitif' culture, the cultural melting pot, the frenzy and excitement of the Paris that Simonetta Fraquelli describes as 'a mythical city ungraspable in its richness and variety' – none of this is recognisable in the contemporary recollections or early papers of Bourgeois.[14]

Fraquelli describes Paris as 'the hedonistic capital of Europe, an artistic crossroads and a testing ground of unparalleled vitality, the goal of artists in search of freedom and inspiration.'[15] What we can ascertain from Bourgeois' recollections and biography is her sense of a testing ground, of the high stakes of producing an art that one might describe as contemporary, 'avant-garde'. Beyond the studio and her work there is little of the hedonism we imagine; she writes of

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[13] This remains in question, sometimes Bourgeois concurs that she undertook her degree on other occasions she denies achieving any formal qualifications.

[14] Simonetta Fraquelli, 'Montparnasse and the Right Bank: Myth and Reality' in Sarah Wilson et al, *Paris: Capital of the Arts 1900-1968* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2002) p. 106.

meeting co-students in the 'moral squalor' of the café *Wadja*, a flirtation with 'the Swiss' and once, in 1938, of going to see three Surrealist films. It seems Bourgeois led an ascetic existence in the city of pleasure.[16] The films she describes only as 'very interesting', a notable addendum to her comment above that Breton's manifesto would make her laugh. Both remarks demonstrate that she was distinctly underwhelmed by the newly fashionable 'avant-garde' movement in contrast to the enthusiasm she expresses for the modernism and vitality of her painting tutors.

What does Bourgeois mean by 'avant-garde' when she introduces 'these names' to Colette? Poggioli's *The Theory of the Avant-garde* defines the avant-garde sociologically: as an expression of alienation from social and cultural conditions and he identifies four defining characteristics: activism, antagonism, nihilism and agonism.[17] Peter Bürger recognises only one form of activism: that which is directed against the institution of art.[18] Of art historians writing on the avant-garde, Paul Mann comments:

> The more definitions of the avant-garde, the more exceptions proliferate, until one must consider the productivity of definition itself... The avant-garde consistently defines itself both in terms of and against definitions imposed upon it; the imperial agency of definitions troubles a margin that both wants to present itself to the public and to elude the reductive capacity of representations, both to be understood and to exceed the status quo of understanding.[19]

Mann indicates the problem of defining a concept that encompasses slippage, almost as tactic, but that is of essence challenging to the activity of defining. Bourgeois' understanding of avant-garde, though, was about position. Of two weeks studying with Lhote, she says:

> The basis of his teaching is that a canvas is an arrangement of lines, surfaces and volume on a plane... On the subject of drawings, you must put the essence of what you want to say into a painting. The rest is *arbitrary*. Chosen with discernment, but chosen, and choice involves elimination. Once the drawing is established and composed, you compose the other values in the same way.[20]

Bourgeois was clearly moved by Lhote's ideas on arbitrary composition and balance. She also indicated to Colette that Yves Brayer was conservative, to the 'right', whilst her own work was moving 'left' – towards abstraction, a purification of expression stated through line and colour. 'Left' is the rebellious 'Independents'.[21] 'Right' is the realist watercolours of Brayer and the academy.

Arriving in New York Bourgeois was shocked by the smallness of her two room apartment, and how difficult it was to relate to people: beyond the language difference, the cultural differences

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[15] Ibid., p. 106.
[16] Between 1936 and 1938 Bourgeois lived outside Paris.
[17] Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Boston: The Bellknap Press of Harvard University, 1968) trans. Gerald Fitzgerald.
[18] Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).
[19] Paul Mann, *The Theory-Death of the Avant-Garde* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991) p. 8.
[20] Bourgeois (1998) p. 27.
[21] Bourgeois was writing at a time when one *had* to be part of a group: if one was not signed up to exhibit with the Surrealists then one must submit to a juried Salon. This changed in New York where one of the defining characteristics of the New York School was the artists' conviction of their independence, their uniqueness and their originality.

were profound. Her hope that they would entertain Robert's friends fell away; their apartment was so small. Bourgeois went back to her study of the history of art and enrolled at the Art Students League to study drawing with the cubist painter, Vaclav Vytlacil. Although Bourgeois studied for two years it seems she was not comfortable, using the college resources mainly in the evenings to print plates that she prepared on the corner of the kitchen table. Bourgeois' recent recollections of these prints suggest that they were an expedient technique, lacking in depth, but allowing her to keep exhibiting, to keep going.[22] More important is how Bourgeois' position in terms of her marriage and sex delineated her situation. When Anthony Caro left the Royal Academy Schools in 1951, he was determined to work with Henry Moore. Already married, he went ahead of his pregnant wife to take lodgings in Perry Green and his family followed him. Caro's is a classic sculptural apprenticeship his early work illustrates how his opportunities to make, facilitated by his assistantship, permitted him an in depth exploration of contemporary languages of form. Bourgeois had a training that was much more ad hoc, combining academic and art historical study with painting and composition. Whilst she recalls knowing by 1938 that she had an affinity towards the three dimensional[23] her only formal sculptural training was with Wlérick (though she insisted in 1968 that Leger's training was sculptural).

Two interesting points emerge from this. One is how Bourgeois' lack of training in the medium she was to pursue has been obscured by her association with well known figures from Le Corbusier to Lhote and Vytlacil. Her education then, was less in her medium than in the ideas of modern art. Secondly, we see how Bourgeois was not able to pursue her goals in the way Caro could because of her subject position. It was nine years before Bourgeois began making her first, crude objects.

Bourgeois' recollections indicate deep loneliness and homesickness:

> That period for me is a determinant period because of the fantastic loneliness that followed my rash leaving home and this is really – this is really the core of my work. It was a loneliness that I could not explain since I was very happy and very grateful. I never missed anything, but I must have missed something very much because I started doing – I started doing a sculpture that was made of people.[24]

In 1966 Bourgeois can speak in different ways, as an established sculptor and mature woman. Before crossing to America, the Goldwaters had adopted Michel, an orphan from Margaux (near Bordeaux). Bourgeois later wrote that this was because she believed that she could not have children. Michel seems to be a tangible Frenchness that Bourgeois took with her. In 1989, she said that she had 'escaped from a French promiscuity'[25] to marry 'a puritan' from a puritanical

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[22] Bourgeois (1998) p. 315, she said, 'I did it for exposure', to Vincent Katz.

[23] "at that time he was making us draw long shavings of wood that would curl like hair, you know, and that he [Leger] would pin with a thumb tack to a shelf and then the shaving would drop softly. And we were supposed to reproduce in trompe l'oeil this spiral shaving. And in this I realized that I was interested in space and there was more of a grasp of form in sculpture than in painting." Interview with Colette Roberts (Archives of American Art: 1968) transcript p. 6.

[24] Unpublished interview, 1966.

[25] 'I had an absolute revulsion of everybody – everything and everybody. Mostly for erotic reasons, sexual reasons. So when I met this American student who was a puritan, I thought it was wonderful. And I married that guy'... 'Coming from a promiscuous milieu I found all that very admirable (the puritanism

country but with Robert she found security, stability, intimacy and fertility. Bourgeois' pregnancy overturned a deep conviction as to her sterility and confronted the fear of sex that she recollects from her youth. In July 1940, Jean-Louis was born and six months later Bourgeois was pregnant again (Alain). Despite this seeming happy ending, her family retained at its centre, in Bourgeois' self identity and in the presences of her three children, a twosome: a single family of two countries, cultures and languages. Bourgeois' Atlantic crossing was a cleavage, splitting from her home country now in distant silence; the battle of the Atlantic prevented the flow of correspondence. Bourgeois' tearing away became cleaving to her new family and home in the isolation of the war.

Complete Shutdown

In February 1939, Bourgeois wrote:

> Our great master is Picasso. As you know Colette, in matters of painting the young are always right. I'm talking of schools rather than individuals. I believe that the truth is on the side of magazines like *Cahiers d'Art* rather than of *Beaux Arts*.[26]

Picasso the model held up for her drawing class. Bourgeois' sides with the young radicals: *Cahiers d'Art* contrasted to *Beaux Arts* in publishing more extreme modernists. Both journals were readily available to, and keenly read by, artists in New York who considered *Cahiers d'Art* the most avant-garde. Edited by Christian Zervos, a close friend of Picasso, *Cahiers d'Art* was a mainstream voice for contemporary artists and writers. It had a good circulation, unlike the little magazines, newssheets and manifestos that have historical currency now but then circulated very little beyond the interested groups from whom they sprung. In the years 1936–9, when Bourgeois was likely to have been able to gain access to *Cahiers d'Art*, it regularly featured surveys of Picasso's work: often of thirty or more full page plates with the briefest of introductions.

Cahiers d'Art frequently published Picasso's contemporaries including: Matisse, Miró, Léger, and Ernst. Many of the writers Zervos used are now associated with Surrealism and other radical positions, including: Georges Bataille, André Breton, André Masson, Tristan Tzara and Paul Eluard, and, of course, Zervos published poems by the late Guillaume Apollinaire. The whole approach of *Cahiers d'Art* was different to *Beaux Arts*: when not showcasing a current artist it detailed the finds of archaeological digs in prehistoric sites (particularly in North Africa) or printed articles on unusual themes. For example, one issue in 1939 begins with a series of Matisse plates followed by representations of death, a reflection on Da Vinci' drawings, 'Le Sacré' (on sacrifice) by Bataille and a survey of recent archaeology on Samos. In short, *Cahiers d'Art* was modern, modernist, challenging and sympathised with the visual imaginary of the avant-garde. *Beaux Arts* represented establishment values and can be compared to the *Burlington Magazine* now. Bourgeois' alignment with *Cahiers d'Art* placed her not as an extreme radical or acolyte surrealist; it places her as a modern, interested in the new master painters and everything radical.

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of America), I have nothing against puritans because I had escaped from a French promiscuity, and thus puritanism did not make me suffer', said to Alain Kirili (1989) in Bourgeois (1998) p. 179.

In August Bourgeois took up this theme again, commenting upon Colette's painting *Shepherd*:

> There are two schools of painters: the ancients (academic) and the others (independent). By ancient I don't mean their age: Bonnard is 75, Picasso is 60, etc. You are taking as your mentors people who can't teach you anything until you have had the experience of abstract painting; then you will observe nature with new eyes.
>
> All this takes us away from the *Shepherd*, but if I were speaking from an academic point of view I would tell you this: keep on with your drawing and gain even more subtleness and subtlety. From what I consider to be the true viewpoint of a twentieth century artist, however; I should say this: renounce skill, shun it.[27]

Hailing Picasso, Bonnard and the 'independents', Bourgeois appeals to Colette to understand her position on abstract painting. Her commitment to the true viewpoint of a twentieth century artist could not be stronger, discover abstraction and shun skill. It is a clear call to follow the model set by Picasso: to follow the lead of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907) and communicate expressively not mimetically. This is 'avant-garde' for Bourgeois, not the appeals to the unconscious of Surrealism, for although her familiarity with it cannot be doubted.[28] Bourgeois' communications with Colette in these months carry this imperative to commit and choose between the ancients and the moderns.

Bourgeois' published letters hardly mention Surrealism, it appears only as reminders to Colette of Bourgeois' cosmopolitan life and artistic circle. Bourgeois was not ignorant of Breton's manifesto, his major 1937 exhibition at *Gradiva* gallery, or his contributions to *Cahiers d'Art*. She had seen some 'Surrealist films', the paintings of Joan Miró, whose retrospective she passed every day on the way to work at the Louvre. In March 1938, the Surrealist exhibition was set as a project in Bourgeois' class and she visited several times, staying for long periods and admiring the objects.[29] Nor can we discount Robert Goldwater's educative role (their friendship began with him giving her lessons on modern art movements), and yet, surrounded by Surrealism's challenge to sensibility, Bourgeois seems hardly touched by it. Unusually, several of Bourgeois' letters to Colette end in a trail of dots... The most intriguing of these ends, 'I exhibited with the Ranson group at Galerie Jean Dufresne: both the Braque and Surrealist influences...'[30] It is a tantalizing moment, would she go on to talk of her own painting or the group around her? This suggests that the editing process may have excluded letters from the collection, perhaps writing Surrealism out of Bourgeois' dominant narrative or, perhaps, the end of the document was simply lost...

We will see that Bourgeois had a second encounter with Surrealism in New York in entirely different circumstances and her Parisian skirmishes, or encounters, took on a new significance once she met the artists in an American context during World War Two.

Pascal Picasso

In her diary in March 1939, Bourgeois wrote:

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[26] Ibid., p. 32.
[27] Ibid., p. 36.
[28] Her early letters note the conversations she had with Robert about Surrealism; it was a fashionable topic for her.
[29] Unpublished interview, 1966.

> Study of *Cahiers d'Art*, Picasso works 1933-34-35: Picasso paints what is true; true movements, true feelings. He is sane and strong and simple and sensitive...
>
> The truth, naturalness, Pascal Picasso. Never depart from the truth even though it seems banal at first. In painting truth is nature. All movements painted by Picasso have been *seen* and *felt*; he is never theatrical. The Surrealists are theatrical. New York painting, the painting that wants to be or is fashionable, is theatrical. Theater is the image of life and Picasso sees life or *rather reality*![31]

Bourgeois' unequivocal support for Picasso and her dismissal of the surrealists demand our attention. In 1935, Zervos produced a special issue on Picasso, 117 pages of drawings, prints and paintings made between late 1932 and 1935 and an artist's statement collated from interviews. Although Picasso's work was frequently reproduced in *Cahiers d'Art*, it is almost certainly this issue that Bourgeois was referring to because this is the only issue that matches the dates Bourgeois specified.

Picasso's work of 1933-5 is well known. It was a period when Picasso was increasingly friendly with the Surrealists, publishing Surrealist-type poetry and creating the cover image for *Minotaur*, Bataille's journal (as we know, he was acclaimed by the Surrealists as their greatest example but never joined.) Bourgeois dismissed the Surrealists for theatricality although they were implicated in the very work of Picasso's that she was admiring. Picasso was close to Bataille at this time and the Eluards, in 1936 he illustrated three of Paul Eluard publications. In 1931 Picasso had illustrated Ovid's *Metamorphoses* for Albert Skira and classical motifs recur in the work in *Cahiers d'Art*. His work in *Cahiers d'Art* concentrated upon lyrical figure painting (including numerous sketches of 'painter and model'), studies for sculpture, architectural constructions, compositions of horse and bull and his small sculptures made at Boiselgoup.

Picasso's work was profoundly introspective at this point, concerned with childhood memories (the bullfight) and moments of sexual intimacy (for instance *The Mirror*, 1932), and his work had an increasingly Spanish flavour. These threads combine in the motif of the Minotaur (see *Dimensions du Cuivre*, 1935) a motif most closely associated with the contemporaneous *Vollard Suite*. As Beast King, the Minotaur contained mythic, magical strength within an untamed, uncivilised, human body. Bourgeois' acknowledged role model was putting forth a visual statement based upon his subjectivity: relationships, fears, fantasy and sexuality. The issue shows a lyrical exploration of the interior needs and drives and the different conceptual spaces of the classical, inaccessible model or woman enclosed within the picture plane. Across many works is a repeated insistence that man, or Minotaur, and woman share the same space but are separated by different forms of line. *Cahiers d'Art* shows an outstanding breadth as different visual languages share the picture space and govern the spaces of Minotaurs, women, artists and models. The issue contained a third message for its readers, the 'daily diary' strategy of continued variation in his drawings.[32] Each was a Pascalian *pensée*, an idea logged, that built into a potential mass in which a finished painting may have been a crescendo but was clearly not a conclusion. Each drawing functioned powerfully, not in terms of craft or engagement with

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[30] Bourgeois (1998) p. 35.
[31] Ibid., p. 40.
[32] This pattern was also clear in the 'Vollard Suite' but the delay in its publication meant that Bourgeois could not have seen it at this time.

the medium, but to explore composition, how emotional charge could be conveyed through a structure often of simple lines. Although famous for his abilities with line, the drawings in 'Cahiers d'Art' are impressive because they are *working* drawings: drawings *at work*.

In August 1939, Bourgeois wrote to Colette from Paris. Like every young artist, she was trying to develop a position, a unique proposition to get her work noticed. Much of her concern with study and reading in her letters seems to ask how to make oneself different:

> I am preparing for the Salon d'Automne and studying, trying to understand the process by which a painter like Picasso came to the work he is doing today; and studying the group with whom he exchanged views and ideas especially Guillaume Apollinaire and Max Jacob. It is quite clear that as early as 1912 [date underlined three times] the whole cubist movement and the surrealist movement can be found in the work of those two poets. The two movements are completely opposed to one another in painting, since the former deals almost exclusively with plastic problems and the latter with literary problems. The poet owns the field of images as well as the field of words. As a creator of images, the poet is close to us, which is why I read Joyce, Jarry, James, and Gertrude Stein. I'll talk to you about it all some other time. You mentioned sketches; I don't do them anymore. I do unshaded drawings, as thoughtful and delicate as they used to be emphatic, and I go on working at a form for days and days.[33]

Bourgeois' concern with Picasso and his circle recognised the complexity of the involvement between the literary and painterly circles. This was a topical point because the lack of a relationship between writers and artists in the United States was a great concern for American artists (and a subject Robert Goldwater would later take up in his editorial work) and Bourgeois seems to have taken up a linear practice of variation. Bourgeois' was reading the canon of 'avant-garde' modernists; Surrealism appears as corollary to the work of Apollinaire and Jacob, an obvious extension of the ideas that led to cubism. Bourgeois' engagement with the Surrealist group becomes less significant if its importance lies in the progenitors Jacob and Apollinaire and not in Breton and his cohorts. Bourgeois' aim here was to understand the poetry and its power of imagery, not to understand the Surrealists. Her description of her drawing process is reminiscent of the *Cahiers d'Art* issue on Picasso: repeat and vary, repeat and vary, simple line drawings exploring compositions and expressive potential.

Perhaps we should replace the 'influence' of Surrealism with an idea of an active engagement with the model of Picasso. Raine Crone and Petrus Graf Schaesberg mention Picasso in *Louise Bourgeois: the Secret of the Cells*, but their purpose is to position Bourgeois as heir to the revolutionary sculptural mantle of Rodin, Brancusi and Picasso as the greatest figures of their generation and to show Bourgeois as the greatest figure of our generation.[34] My point is rather that Picasso himself presents a model of modernist art making that Bourgeois engages with very seriously. Georges Besson wrote, 'Nothing is riskier than trying to define Picasso the man, more famous than Buddha or the Virgin Mary, more mercurial than a crowd.'[35] As Picasso dissolves into a mythic god, so Bourgeois' letters suggest she became fascinated with him as succour to her own crisis: her cleaving wounds of passage and her seizure of expression.

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[33] Bourgeois (1998) p. 35.
[34] Rainer Crone and Petrus Graf Schaesberg, *Louise Bourgeois – the secret of the cells* (Munich, London, New York: Prestel, 1998) p. 68.
[35] Besson quoted in John Berger, *The Success and Failure of Picasso* (London: Granta, 1992).p. 6.

Bourgeois was chasing a dream of creative energy, success and artistic integrity just as we are chasing her myth.

The beginning of Berger's *Success and Failure of Picasso* is reminiscent of my own early work on Bourgeois.[36] Berger notes how critics and promoters characterize Picasso: he is Orpheus, he is a toreador, he can stop time, his style is all his own – owing nothing to anyone – and what he *is* is more important than what he does. This fascination and expectation is also present in the promotional material and press cuttings on Bourgeois. In Picasso Bourgeois found not just formal resonances but a strategy for a career: the ultimate 'avant-garde' (as Bourgeois framed it) and the epitome of mainstream success. Bourgeois wanted Picasso's oppositional stance but also his establishment centrality and she engaged with the theoretical and visual strategies in *Cahiers d'Art*. Picasso's *Cahiers d'Art* statement emphasized the primacy of expression and truth to oneself. He talked of the prime importance of the artist's interior life, their suffering as central to their work (his own example was Cezanne) and of his mining of his own past work and life for new content. Bourgeois' narration of her practice can be seen to be in line with this, so much so that it could have been written about her.

In January 1940, Bourgeois wrote:

> There was an exhibition of 400 paintings by Picasso here (forty years work). It was so beautiful, and it revealed such genius and such a collection of treasures that I did not pick up a paintbrush for a month. Complete shutdown.[37]

The problem of expression with which we began, has reached crisis: complete shutdown. France was at war and the United States was speculating about its own forthcoming role in the conflict. German warships and U-boats patrolled the Atlantic destroying the possibility of communicating with her family and connecting with her past. Picasso's most comprehensive retrospective had come to New York, memories of her father's service in the First World War would have intensified her fears and most confusing of all Louise Bourgeois had just discovered that she was pregnant.

Faced with Picasso's brilliant retrospective, her tumultuous personal circumstances and her problems with her own practice, she shut down. At the same time, this was a period of nothingness *where it was all happening*. The strangeness of pregnancy and this could only make more intense the claustrophobic alienation of her new country, her second language, her tiny home and the loneliness of emigration made more intense by the outbreak of war in Europe. It is out of this crisis and slippage of her sense of self and the example of creative energy and expressive fluency she found in Picasso that Bourgeois forged a practice. This is not the easy metaphor of an artistic 'pregnancy', rather, Bourgeois' turmoil and crisis of expression resolved itself slowly, at the pace of life, at the pace of motherhood. It took eleven years from disembarking in New York for Bourgeois to achieve her first solo show as a sculptor in the United States. It took eleven years for Bourgeois to resolve her crisis of expression into a mature sculptural practice.

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Bourgeois (1998) p. 38. The exhibition is detailed in Alfred H. Barr, *Picasso: Forty Years of His Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1940).

Apollinaire wrote of the extreme artistic transformation of Picasso as he developed cubism:

> There are poets to whom a muse dictates their works, there are artists whose hand is guided by an unknown being who uses them like an instrument... They are not men but poetic or artistic instruments. Their reason is powerless against themselves, they do not have to struggle and their works show no trace of struggle. They are not divine, they can do without themselves, they are as it were an extension of nature. Their works bypass the intelligence. They can be moving although the harmonies they strike are never humanized. And then there are other poets, other artists who wrestle. They struggle towards nature but have no immediate closeness to nature; they have to draw everything out of themselves, and no demon, no muse inspires them. They are alone and nothing gets expressed except when they themselves have stammered, stammered so often that sometimes after much effort and many attempts they are able to formulate what they wanted to formulate. Men created in the image of God, they will rest one day to admire what they have made. But the weariness! The imperfections! The labour! Picasso was an artist like the former. There had never been a spectacle so fantastic as the metamorphosis he underwent in becoming an artist like the latter.[38]

Apollinaire's lyrical writing constitutes Picasso as denying his gift in order to achieve modernism. My purpose is not to presume a parallel gift for Bourgeois but to say that, like Picasso, her 'transformation' was also a self-initiated and profound, wearisome labour. Bourgeois' transformation was about resolving her personal circumstances and her artistic ambitions; it was a struggling, stammering creation of an idiosyncratic phraseology of sculpture prolonged by maternity and domestic life. Through this process, she found her voice: the centrality of emotional expression over other painterly concerns. Picasso as model: his wrestling, as characterised here, is a stammering struggle to express. *This* is how Bourgeois made her stalled ideas pregnant with possibility; *Morning* (1944) is particularly engaged with Picasso's work (plate 4).[39] Bourgeois is not drawn into the 'influence' of the Surrealists, nor awed by a notion of artist-genius as a force of nature, but is fighting her own wars, manoeuvring in the positional game: *engaging* with painterly modernism through the model of Picasso. Bloom notes that an ancient aspect of 'influence' is 'having power over another'; the dominance of the idea of the inflow of ideas into the artist, the muse in Apollinaire's eulogy has diverted us from the operations of power. Bourgeois' slow metamorphosis into anxious, struggling, stammering artist is, in some sense, recognition of her own force. As Michel Foucault wrote, '...war and battle. The history that determines us has the form of a war rather than a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning.'[40] Foucault's model seems apposite: from here on the struggle, the fight began.

War

In 1941, the Goldwaters moved to East 18th street and it was here that towards the end of the decade she began to experiment with sculpture. At the end of 1941, the United States finally entered the war. Bourgeois was less active artistically in the war years and it seems that time passed slowly, watching her family grow and worrying about events far away. Bourgeois' biographers write vaguely that she was 'involved in war work'. Bourgeois was drawn to the

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[38] Apollinaire, 'Les Peintres Cubistes' (1912) quoted in John Berger, p. 74.

[39] A number of prints from these years are reproduced in Wye, *The Prints of Louise Bourgeois* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art New York, 1994).

radical continental presses, Italian anti-Fascist material and publications of the French underground. Her interest in Picasso deepened and not only in his works but his circle and their ideas about art, poetry and the modern challenge. Bourgeois' annual visits to France were made impossible by the war at sea and her homesickness worsened. Sarah Wilson described wartime Paris through Michaux:

> The prolonged continuum of Occupation was nightmarish. In 1944, Henri Michaux wrote 'from the City of Interrupted Time... from the land of atrocity... from the Capitol of the sleeping crowd', concluding, 'We live with indifference within the horror.'[41]

In Paris swastikas hung from the Eiffel Tower and 'degenerate' art was burnt in the gardens of the Musée du Jeu de Paume, *Beaux Arts* magazine became the mouthpiece of the Vichy regime promoting anti-Modernism and anti-Semitism and *Cahiers d'Art* stopped printing. Bourgeois was fighting her own war with the isolation of motherhood and the alienation of homesickness. Bourgeois was also fighting to save her practice from its encounter with Picasso and in these years of battle, she developed new tactics and strategies on all fronts.

Bourgeois met many people through her husband whose book *Primitivism in Modern Art* was a success and was making him an important figure in fashionable, artistic circles. Some became her friends, others were fleeting acquaintances. One recent catalogue lists some of these 'names' in order to fill in the war years which otherwise lack the corralling curriculum vitae details. The list evidences both her centrality of social position and her continuing pursuit of her artistic ambitions:

> Bourgeois circulates within a world of art historians that includes such figures as Alfred Barr, René D'Harnoncourt, Walter Friedlander, Lloyd Goodrich, Clement Greenberg, Belle Krasne, Dwight McDonald, Erwin Panofsky, Philip Rahv, John Rewald, Michel Seuphor, Meyer Shapiro, James Johnson Sweeney, David Sylvester, and Lionel Trilling. Bourgeois and Goldwater also socialize with gallery owners Leo Castelli, Charles Egan, Peggy Guggenheim, Sidney Janis, Pierre Matisse, Betty Parsons, Ellie Poindexter, Lou Pollack and Curt Valentine, as well as American artists John Cage, Ralston Crawford, Stuart Davis, Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, Loren McIver, Louise Nevelson, Maurice Prendergast, Hans Richter, and Mark Rothko. European artists such as André Breton, Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, Fernand Léger, André Masson, Piet Mondrian, and Yves Tanguy are also in New York City, after World War II. Along with these artists, art historians and gallery owners, Louise and Robert socialize with architects such as Le Corbusier, Edgar Kaufman, Philip Johnson, José Luis Sert, and Paul Nelson. Through Le Corbusier Louise becomes friends with Matta and Nemecio Antunez, both of whom worked for Le Corbusier.[42]

Though not exhaustive, this list connects Bourgeois with almost everyone of historical note that one can place in New York in the period.[43] One might add only a few others that Bourgeois has mentioned, Jean Arp, Ruthven Todd, Alexander Calder, Philip Guston, Henri Michaux and Gertrude and Balcomb Greene. Many catalogue chronologies concentrate upon the older

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[40] Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977) p. 221.

[41] Sarah Wilson, 'Saint-Germain-des-Pres: Antifascism, Occupation and Post-War Paris' *Paris Capital of the Arts*, p 240.

[42] Chronology from, *Louise Bourgeois, Memory and Architecture* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 2000) pp. 285-6.

European and Surrealist artists that Bourgeois met and the Greenes stand out as representing another direction in New York art, as active members of the American Abstract Artists. Often omitted from such lists, is Bourgeois' neighbour and friend, Varian Fry. A Quaker and poet, Fry joined the Emergency Rescue Committee[44] and organised loans, passports, visas and escape routes for threatened intellectuals, artists and writers. In 1966 Bourgeois recalled:

> I would say, two dozen, [émigrés from France] not more, settled in New York and then – then of course we saw them, mostly at Varian's house. Lipchitz was already irascible and Duchamp was prima donna-ish but they remained very much what they were... I was not in the same age bracket, but I found it a privilege then to know these people really, as a student. I never compared myself with them and also I must say that I was not over-impressed. I had the attitude of a student.[45]

Bourgeois' attitude may have remained that of the student but her position changed radically once her children were born. The relationship with art historians, gallerists and artists now was not within the known territories of either fee-paying student or acolyte; she was Robert's wife, a new mother and out of bounds. Her recollections are bitter with resentment at the social games and flirtations through which other young artists made themselves noticed, but which were closed to her. On the other hand, it is clear that Robert's social network provided Bourgeois with a place to hone the social skills which, although it may have been difficult at the time, have made her such a canny operator on the art scene now.

The Goldwaters purchased a country home in Easton, in the southwest corner of Connecticut, and Bourgeois and the children spent long stretches of the war years there. Bourgeois continued making prints, such as *Easton* (1940/1) a small drypoint (plate 5). A peaceful domestic scene, *Easton* continues a concern with Picasso's work. Bourgeois's prints trace her changing formal concerns in these early years when she painted very little. A number of European émigré artists also settled in Connecticut. Without exception they bought further north: by the lakes and hills beyond the commuter belt where properties were cheaper. Calder and David Hare lived near Roxbury, the Massons (who Bourgeois visited) in New Preston, Marie and Eugene Jolas at Lake Waramaug. Kay Sage and Yves Tanguy moved to Woodbury, the Gorkys stayed in New Milford and later Sherman and the Levys bought in Bridgewater.[46]

Again Bourgeois brushed against the Surrealists, the bulk of the French refugee artists. From this second encounter, I would like to consider what Bourgeois' experience of Surrealism might have been. 'Surrealism' is almost impossibly heterogeneous and the difficulty of approaching this term has led to inventive art historical approaches, yet it remains a paradoxical term, both always familiar to us – we *know* what Surrealism is – and yet representing an energy and

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[43] Of historical colour are Bourgeois' comments about Clement Greenberg the 'fair haired child' ,who dined frequently with them and his hostile relations with Alfred Barr in Florence Rubenfeld, *Clement Greenberg, a Life* (New York: Scribner, 1997) p. 104.

[44] The Emergency Rescue Committee was established with private contribution in the United States, and was concerned with the fate of the European intelligentsia under Hitler. As a private organisation, its efforts to bring intellectuals out of France often suffered the dilatory action of the U.S. consulate. The Emergence Rescue Committee was largely responsible for transporting the French refugees in that Bourgeois met New York. See Martica Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile and the beginning of the New York School* (Cambridge, MA and London UK: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1997).

[45] Unpublished interview, 1966.

[46] Martica Sawin describes this in detail, p. 176.

plurality that is strangely lost to us.[47] Rather than add to the difficulties of stylistic and historical analyses I want to ask what Surrealism meant for Bourgeois.

In Paris, whilst Bourgeois was primarily concerned with post-cubist abstraction she was open to Surrealist experiences and we can sense a certain *permeation* taking place. As one's clothes take up the smells of the street or the smoke of cigarettes in a café so when there are ideas in the air we breathe them in. In 1966 Bourgeois recalled:

> That famous show [Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme, Galerie des Beaux-Arts, Paris, 1938]... at lunchtime I would stop there and actually stay a long time in the show and several times I was struck by the absolute beauty of the objects. And since I lived outside the city I did not attend their literary expressions; I knew almost exclusively the visual ones and to me it was very beautiful. It was very pure and there was – it was completely dissociated from the verbal aspect of the Surrealists that has been a reproach to them. But from the start they knew a beautiful form when they saw one.[48]

In her recollections Bourgeois distances herself from the literary aspects of Surrealism, claiming to have responded only to its 'pure' and 'beautiful' forms. This recollection positions Bourgeois alongside the American avant-garde: the Abstract Expressionists and the New York School largely rejected the literariness of Surrealism. As we shall see, artists in America adopted ideas of art making that were Surrealist in kind but did not accept its positions. Robert Motherwell wrote in 1944 'What we love best in the Surrealist artists is not their programme... but their formalist innovations.'[49] We can be confident that Bourgeois' understanding was some way from André Breton's 1924 manifesto definition:

> Surrealism, n.m. Pure psychic automatism by which one seeks to express, be it verbally, in writing or in any other manner, the real workings of the mind. Dictated by the unconscious, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, and free from aesthetic or moral preoccupations.[50]

Instead, Bourgeois' experience of Surrealism in America was mediated not only by the challenges of Dalí and Bataille, but also by ideas that Dore Ashton terms 'post-Surrealist': ideas of those who in one way or another had fallen out with Breton, and yet further by the American discourse of art circulating around her.

In the background of Bourgeois' wartime experience was Robert's close connection to the younger generation of American artists who later became the Abstract Expressionists; he taught alongside Robert Motherwell at Mt Holyoke College (1944) where Hayter and Masson were also his colleagues. We know that the arrival of the émigrés was on the back of years of exposure to

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[47] Surrealism more than many other critical moments in the history of art seems to be difficult to access: as if it existed itself in a dream state, or within a 'large glass'.

[48] Unpublished interview 1966. Bourgeois was vague about the date but she was clear that it was after the Great Exposition (1937) making the International exhibition of 1938 the most likely candidate. This exhibition is remembered for the mannequins where the artists, in Sarah Wilson's words, 'indulged their sadomasochistic fantasies: caged by André Masson, sexually travestied by Marcel Duchamp' *Paris, Capital of the Arts*, p. 236.

[49] Robert Motherwell, 'The Modern Painter's World', *Dyn*, 6 (November, 1944), p. 9. From a lecture at Mount Holyoke College (August 10, 1944) quoted in Guilbaut, p. 82.

[50] Quoted in Henry Geldzahler, *New York Painting and Sculpture: 1940-1970* (London: Pall Mall, 1969) p. 394. Almost from the moment of declaration, Breton's formulation faced problems with painting; Pierre Naville was quick to point out the contradiction inherent in Breton's assertion of how organisation of the picture surface undermined the lack of purity of automatism. So began Breton's shifting methods.

Surrealist ideas through *Cahiers d'Art* and major exhibitions.[51] Breton's ideas, his interpretation of Freud and opposing positions, such as Masson's, were well known within artistic circles, but the arrival of the artists themselves had a huge effect. Recalling these years Goldwater wrote:

> Their actual appearance in New York had a tremendous impact, even though their relation to the larger artistic community was tangential at best. To see, occasionally to talk with, Mondrian, Masson, Ernst, Tanguy, Léger, Lipchitz, Duchamp, among others, was, so to speak, to join the School of Paris, to join that is, on to the central creative tradition of twentieth century art, and through it to become part of the series of artistic revolutions that went back to Cézanne and Monet... The predominantly Surrealist group that had arrived, international in character, bohemian in a self-confident intensive fashion possible (after so many depression years) to none of the New York artists, living as if they had no money worries, with at best a very different more theoretical concern for social problems, had this in common with the artist who had experienced the WPA: they too existed on the margins of society, though it was perhaps a brighter margin.[52]

Goldwater reminds us that it was not only Surrealists that arrived: Mondrian's appearance gave a boost to the geometric abstraction of the American Abstract Artists, for instance. The New York scene, suddenly found itself the centre; there was very little happening in occupied Paris and the most challenging artists (except for Picasso) were suddenly present. In November 1941 the Museum of Modern Art exhibited the work of Dalí and Miró (curator James Johnson Sweeney quoted Breton's description of Miró as 'the most Surrealist of us all'). So Bourgeois' personal contact was in the context of the refugee artists' cultural domination: world famous and well exposed in New York's major spaces. Bourgeois had not experienced the Workers Projects Administration (WPA or 'the Project') but she could empathise with the American artists' feeling of being marginal and she could understand the refugees' conviction:

> of the importance of art even in the midst of cataclysm, for all that it was partly expressed through annoying poses, was sincere and contagious... It was a point of view that the American avant-garde at the time (most of them adherents of the American Abstract Artists) who based themselves on a careful post-cubist abstraction or even more measured post-Mondrian deliberation, had not experienced.[53]

Goldwater recalls a bohemian posing that was nevertheless magnetic and engaging in its commitment to the importance of the subconscious and the importance of art in a climate of adversity. The call to intuition did not necessarily conform to the exact formations of 'automatic' or 'paranoiac-critical' theories. The Surrealists' manifold message became distorted and scattered as they fought amongst themselves and as they were adopted and reinterpreted by the American artists. Bourgeois' response to the Surrealists becomes entangled with that of those artists who would later become the New York School, as in many ways she shared their problems. Having developed a post-cubist, abstract style, and lost in a sense of wartime political crisis and futility, they were all looking for the next development: looking for progress.

Surrealism was not the only new development available to New York artists, although nothing at this time seems to be disconnected from their activities. In 1941, the Museum of Modern Art staged a major exhibition of Native American art, displayed in environments designed to give

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[51] Most notably *Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism* (The Museum of Modern Art, 1936) but also Julien Levy published *Surrealism* in the same year and showed a number of surrealist artists (Man Ray, Ernst, Dalí, Giacometti, Magritte, Tanguy) between 1932 and 1936.

[52] Robert Goldwater, 'Reflections on the New York School', *Quadrum* (no. 8, 1960, 16-30) p. 24.

the exhibits cultural context, the curation maximised their totemic and symbolic significances. This exhibition revealed a domestic primitive and native mythology to hold up to the European archaeological finds in *Cahiers d'Art* and *Minotaure* and has generally been seen as important for American artists at this point. During the 1930s, mythology was an increasingly important subject matter for Surrealists and American artists who were also aware of Picasso's mythological subjects. The renewed interest in native American art after 1941 heightened the interest in mythology which the Surrealists had imported: for instance Benjamin Peret and Kurt Seligmann wrote about Native American subjects from a Surrealist position both before and after they arrived in America. Gottlieb's 'Rape of Persephone' (1943) and Rothko's 'The Syrian Bull' (1943) are commonly cited as evidence of the infusion of mythology, metamorphosis and the Jung-Freud debate into the avant-garde.[54] Rather than trace this lineage, I wish to show the particular context Bourgeois' second encounter with Surrealism. Surrealism's aspects became diffuse as Americans were drenched in automatism, intuition and mythology without adhering to a manifesto or leader and this gave Bourgeois new possibilities to come to terms with Picasso's mastery and eclecticism and yet hold to his commitment to the *work* and to an intuitive and expressive mode.

Both Freud and Jung had lectured in New York during the First World War, and their ideas were popular with American artists. Bourgeois read Freud in 1951, but if she was not already familiar with the ideas of psychoanalysis when she left Paris she would certainly have found them a currency of artistic conversation in New York during the war. The Surrealists and refugee artists' interest in psychoanalysis transferred to the American artists a belief in the unconscious, as Pollock wrote in 1944:

> Thus the fact that the European moderns are now here is very important, for they bring with them an understanding of the problems of modern painting. I am particularly impressed with their concept of the source of art being the unconscious. This idea interests me more than these specific painters do, for the two artists I admire most, Picasso and Miró are still abroad.[55]

Pollock's general interest does not distinguish between the alternative theories of Freud and Jung. André Breton's writings remained true to his own interpretation of Freud but many renegade Surrealists and abstract artists found sympathy with Jung's ideas, for he did not insist upon the source of everything being in the unconscious, nor did he favour the automatist method. As interest grew in the native totems and mythology in general so Jung's ideas on universal symbols, collective consciousness and primordial experience, seemed increasingly relevant. For example, Ashton quotes Wolfgang Paalen:

> [The dream] egoistically preoccupied with satisfying individual desire, usually remains without collective importance even when using universal symbols – while artistic

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[53] Ibid.

[54] See Guilbaut and/or Dore Ashton, *The New York School – a cultural reckoning* (Berkeley, LA and Oxford UK: University of California Press, 1973) outline the controversy these paintings created when exhibited in the Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors third annual exhibition, (June 1943).

[55] Jackson Pollock, 'Answers to a Questionnaire', *Arts and Architecture* (no 61, February, 1944) reprinted in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, *Art in Theory: 1900-1990* (Oxford UK and Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1992) p.561.

> creation... attains collective importance when it succeeds in formulating what inspiration reveals in the depths of the ego – there where 'I is another.'[56]

Ashton designates Paalen a 'post-Surrealist' because his system, clearly resembling Jung's, look, to symbols and tales from thousands of years ago and undermines the Surrealist procedure of drawing images from the mind's depths *without* the imposition of consciousness. Behind Paalen's turn to myth lay the desire to pierce human experience without being limited to the events of a single individual's life; in a sense it ran parallel to earlier Surrealist aims by, crudely speaking, attempting to penetrate a 'collective unconscious.'[57]

In the 1939 double issue of *Minotaure* Breton, recognizing the difficulty of automatism for painting, launched an alternative practice which found sympathy in New York. Artists, he suggested, instead of painting tired still-lifes should substitute 'the work of art event': a thing justified by its power of revelation. 'The taste for risk is undeniably the principal mechanism capable of carrying man forward to an unknown way',[58] the familiarity now of 'risk' and 'event' hardly needs to be remarked upon as they became exemplified in the image of Pollock and broadcast by Harold Rosenberg in his notion of 'action painting'. Breton felt his new process was exemplified by Masson whose spirit, he wrote, was responsive to 'that life which he wishes to surprise at its source, and which draws him eclectically to metamorphoses.'[59] It is as if the Surrealists were metamorphosing themselves, becoming more individual and less programmatic. The importance of process enunciated in the Surrealists' idea of metamorphosis was registered by New York Artists as a kind of intuitive transformation of the canvas or material.

Masson's is also a 'post-Surrealist' position, going beyond Breton's intuitive 'work of art event' and radically adapting the automatic method by starting with a natural object as subject matter:

> Masson began by meditating upon objects located either in the mind or suggested to the mind by nature. Natural objects then gave rise to a series of unrecognisable forms which seemed abstract by comparison to their model. Imagination was thus superior to both nature and reason. In elevating the power of the imagination over the exterior world, Masson's automatism exemplified the Surrealists urge to tap the raw material of the human mind.[60]

Buettner's reading of Masson as exemplifying the core urge of Surrealism – to tap into the mind at its deepest level – whilst undoing the strictness of automatism as practiced a decade earlier, parallels the use of mythology to also fathom the deepest recesses of the mind. Both ideas expand what American artists and Bourgeois understood of the Surrealist movement beyond the prescriptive manifestos and essays. By the time that Bourgeois started to meet Surrealist artists in America[61] and acknowledge in person their ideas, the movement, with Breton's

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[56] Wolfgang Paalen, *Form and Sense* (New York: Wittenborn and Schultz, 1945) quoted in Ashton, p. 125.
[57] Cf. Stuart Buettner, *American Art Theory 1945-70* (Michigan: UMI Press, 1981) this is an excellent discussion.
[58] André Breton quoted in Ashton, p. 115.
[59] Ibid. Masson, in the language of the history of Surrealism, 'broke with' Breton in the last years of the war.
[60] Buettner, p. 51.
[61] For example, Bourgeois met Breton at the OWI, the French language radio station where he worked.

continued expulsions and widespread revisions of technique and belief, was according to many on its knees and yet in unravelling, its strands were becoming important to the new, American audience.

The Surrealists caused controversy, Peyton Boswell, editor of *Art Digest*, described the 'Dalí-Breton-Ernst crowd' as 'clever businessmen who know all the local stops of the publicity racket.' Nonetheless, he also raised an important point:

> Is Surrealism contributing anything of lasting value to the sum total of art history? The answer is yes. Perhaps the weakest factor in American art is its poverty of imagination, its unthinking insistence upon painting endless miles of literal landscapes, insipid still lifes, static figures. The Surrealists are stimulating Americans to use their eyes less and their minds more, to develop their imaginations.[62]

The 'American scene' was what the younger New York artists railed against; the emphasis on interior life (Ernst made 'what is visible inside him')[63] engaged both Bourgeois *and* her American contemporaries. Surrealism presented a set of strategies to escape from a series of stale positions: 'realism and the American scene' and 'post-cubist abstraction'.

By 1944, the first cohesive attempts to examine the interactions that had been taking place in New York were emerging and Bourgeois began to paint again.[64] Her paintings were flat, grid based, skill-shunning, symbolic canvasses. They connect not only to the work of Ernst, for instance, but to her American contemporaries. Bourgeois' early paintings such as *Natural History* (1944, plate 6) and *Connecticutiana* (1944-5, plate 7) compare with Gottlieb's paintings of 1943, such as *Pictograph 4* (1943, plate 8). In common is a flat surface separated into a grid containing symbolic imagery such as birds, eyes and faces; totemic imagery, responding in Gottlieb's case, to Native American totems. Rothko's work of 1942, for instance *Untitled (number 3079.40)*, is also comparable. Rothko credited the Surrealists with 'uncovering the glossary of myth and establishing a congruity between the phantasmagoria of the unconscious and the objects of everyday life.'[65] Bourgeois' paintings share the commitment of both her contemporaries and the Surrealists and exhibit a strategic engagement not with the tenets of Surrealism but with a general idea of unconscious, a vague idea of the primacy of interior life and of privileging intuition. Whilst now the dominant account is keen to separate Bourgeois from her peers in New York, as Michael Corris points out Ad Reinhardt's satirical cartoons (*PM* magazine 1946-51) grouped Bourgeois with Rothko, Gottlieb and Loren MacIver.[66]

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[62] Peyton Boswell, *Art Digest* (May 15, 1943) quoted in Sawin, p. 293. Interestingly, the terms of Fried's classic 'Art and Objecthood' were not his inventions but made use of concepts that had been in intellectual currency since the 1940s. (For instance above, Bourgeois criticised Surrealism for its theatricality.) Boswell's decrying of 'literal' landscapes anticipates Fried. That Fried connected minimalism not only to being 'literal' but through it to the figurative painting of the American scene, the heritage that vanguard art was trying to shed, enriches our reading of Fried.

[63] Max Ernst in *Beyond Painting* (1948) p. 20, quoted in Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge MA and London UK: MIT Press, 1993) p. 60.

[64] Sidney Janis, *Abstract and Surrealist Art in America* (Raynal and Hitchcock, 1944). For more on this book see Sawin (1997)and Irving Sandler, *Abstract Expressionism – The Triumph of American Painting* (London: Pall Mall, 1970).

[65] Sawin, p. 301.

[66] Ad Reinhardt: 'How to Look at Modern Art in America' *PM* magazine (06.02.1946). Reinhardt's complete cartoons were shown at Daniel Silverstein Gallery (New York: December 2003) cf. Michael Corris, '"Fuzzy" Bourgeois', *MoMA Papers*, pp. 13-20.

Drawing together Bourgeois and her New York contemporaries with Picasso and the Surrealists is a deeply subjective use of the canvas (or medium). Picasso's depictions of painters and Minotaurs are projections of desire: virile, tragic, elderly or detached. Similarly Bourgeois' grid paintings, her canvases of women floating above roof tops, the ambiguous *Femme Maison* paintings, where the figure's relationship to the building is of filling, hiding, trapping, comfort and claustrophobia, are all primarily emotions: pensées, fantasies and fears. In common are not the automatic practices of the Surrealists, but the intuitive, symbolic, mythical and totemic mode of the Jungian post-Surreal positions. Deborah Wye's 1982 catalogue separates Bourgeois from her colleagues by suggesting that other New York artists adopted automatism whilst Bourgeois moved towards a symbolic literalism.[67] Wye is correct to observe that Bourgeois adopted symbolic literalness but not to use this to separate Bourgeois from her peers. Together they explored a density of ideas, native American myth, a call to intuition and the imagination and, as we shall see, the ethics of Existentialism. Bourgeois' strategy was part of a continuum of activities within the New York scene.

Going Solo

Bourgeois' first post-war manoeuvre was curating *Documents France 1940-1944: Art-Literature-Press of the French Underground* at the Norlyst Gallery, 1945. It illustrated her concern for her homeland. Included in the exhibition were work by Bonnard, Picasso, poems by Aragon and Loys Masson, texts by Gide, Gertrude Stein and Jean-Paul Sartre's *La Nausée* and, in the section on underground anti-nazi press; a sample of *Combat* (an opposition paper founded by Albert Camus in 1943) for which Sartre was a correspondent. Arranged with Duchamp's help, this exhibition places Bourgeois firmly in between the French and American struggles, as this thesis progresses we shall see that in-between itself becomes a strategy for Bourgeois.

News trickled out of artists and writers who had died at the hands of the Germans and then of the greater horrors of the death camps. The Americans began to distance themselves from the infighting of the Surrealists and as soon as possible most refugee artists left to return home. *Time* magazine's Paris wrote of Breton's show at *Maeght* gallery, 'After the gas chambers, those heaps of bones and teeth and shoes and eyeglasses, what is there left for the poor Surrealists to shock us with?'[68] A bleakness of a different order; a weary, un-shockable, empty sadness filled the gap left by the returning refugees. The turmoil of the war years ended in absolute horror, in innumerable deaths. It had been a strange time, a sur-real time of darkness and silence from France but of peace and rural comfort in Connecticut, of intellectual excitement and energy in New York and frustration with the toil of raising children and with that timeless strugge to make a practice work: to metamorphose.

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[67] 'Through emphasis on the technique of automatism, most New York school painters moved in the direction of a pure abstraction involving large format, all over composition, atmospheric fields, and sublime mystical content. Bourgeois, in contrast, moved toward a greater psychological literalness... In effect Surrealism encouraged her to tap the complex texture of her personal life as a source for art.' Wye (1982) p. 17.

[68] Quoted in Sawin, p. 378.

In 1945 Bourgeois had her first solo painting exhibition, showing twelve works including *Connecticutiana*, *Mr. Follet* and *Natural History* but soon after stopped painting and began to experiment with printing and sculpture. Bourgeois does not consider these paintings mature work, repeatedly beginning her career with her first sculpture exhibition at the Peridot gallery in 1949. After the 1945 exhibition, Bourgeois' painting style changed dramatically: she left the grid structure and used the whole page, or canvas, to delineate one image, a floating long-haired Louise or a woman-house. These works were more narrative and less cryptic than her 'pictograph' paintings (or in Barnet Newman's terms 'ideograph').[69] They were more expressive, seeming to be channels of emotion and fantasy and they are characteristically difficult: smiling figures float or stand on roof tops that might equally part of a nightmare or dreamily happy, such as plate 9, *Untitled* (1946-7) and plate 10, *Roof Song* (1947). It was a period of relatively rapid changes: moving in five years between painting, print and sculpture.

In 1946, Bourgeois 'found her way'[70] to Stanley William Hayter's *Atelier 17* where she undertook etching and drypoint. Hayter's workshop and teaching facility had an international profile by the time arrived in New York during the war. Hayter's closeness to art historian Herbert Read and a number of exhibitions, (for instance *Atelier 17*, Leicester Galleries [London, 1947]) kept his name in the press and his workshop in vogue. Deborah Wye is keen to disassociate Bourgeois from the *Atelier 17* group, concentrating upon Bourgeois' friendship with Joan Miró[71] and her differences with Hayter who made Bourgeois feel sidelined and that she was dissatisfying him.[72] Wye's concentration upon the personal interactions between Bourgeois, her contemporaries and Hayter diverts our attention from a number of important points. Firstly, Bourgeois did exhibit as a 'member' of *Atelier 17* at the Laurel Gallery, New York (1949). This is one of several 'memberships' that have been forgotten in the canonical version of Bourgeois' life: the version that states that she has always been loner and a member of no group.[73] Not only is this not true but Bourgeois' very insistence upon individuality, upon being only oneself I believe is a defining characteristic of the group of artists that would later come to be known as the New York School. Further, Bourgeois' gravitation to *Atelier 17* was both a kind of return to the atelier of her training where she was student, and useful translator (at Hayter's she translated for Miró). Simultaneously, it was an astute choice for an artist who, in reality, was no longer a student and for whom print was a successful route to exhibition opportunities. For not only was Hayter a renowned teacher but *Atelier 17* provided a meeting point, a substitute for the boulevard café, for younger artists who were desperate to make themselves noticed and wanted the kudos of the association. After Hayter left to return to England Bourgeois stopped working at *Atelier 17*.

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[69] In her interview with Colette Roberts in 1968, Bourgeois referred to her early work as pictographs.

[70] Wye (1994) p. 26.

[71] Sawin, pp. 170-1.

[72] Interestingly Bourgeois' memories of Hayter are fickle, sometimes she remembers him fondly at other times only that she dissatisfied him, what is important is that she stayed and made *Atelier 17*, for a short time, the centre of her practice. Louise Nevelson also tried to print at *Atelier 17* in the late forties, Laurie Wilson writes: 'Nevelson's brief attempts to work there in the late forties did not prove successful, partly because Hayter was not responsive to women and partly because Nevelson felt too restricted by his emphasis on technique.' Laurie Wilson, *Louise Nevelson: Iconography and Sources* (New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1981) p. 12.

The connection to Miró is complex. Miró arrived in New York in 1947 to complete a mural commission and during and after this project used Hayter's facility. Miró was declared as an inspiration by both Motherwell and Gorky, and was written about by Abstract Expressionism's central advocate Clement Greenberg, so his role, like Picasso, is pivotal on both sides (Surrealist and abstract) – if there are sides – and certainly suggests less distance than one might imagine between the two. Bourgeois claiming him as an 'influence' in this context claims something more than Surrealism and something beyond it. Nixon notes Bourgeois' photographs taken with Miró as parodying Picasso; for Bourgeois both figures were giants in the history of forms.[74]

He Disappeared into Complete Silence was made at *Atelier 17* and published in a limited numbered edition in 1947 by the Gemor Press established by Anaïs Nin. The Gemor press printed the pages which Bourgeois sewed together herself.[75] The introduction was written by Marius Bewley, director of Peggy Guggenheim's gallery, *Art of This Century* (plates 11-20). It was the first time Bourgeois used poetic language as an integral part of her work and it marks a point of departure in substituting architectural structures for figures. This work, of all Bourgeois' oeuvre, is possibly the most engaged with the tactics of Surrealism and perhaps reflects the atmosphere of *Atelier 17* and Hayter's affinity with Surrealism. Bourgeois' recollections of this work do not relate either to the parables attached to each image or Surrealist methods. Rather, in the mode of an *engagement* with a field of possibilities, the prints adopt formal qualities of Surrealism; the dreamscape look, the technique of substitution, and the emphasis upon interior life. Bourgeois' recollections, made in the 1980s and 1990s, describe conscious *not* unconscious subjective states; the descent into depression, the fear of hurt and of hurting, the need to survive and a feeling of helplessness suggesting that the plates use symbols that she is able to remember and reread.[76] *Plate seven / Two Personages*, is the only one to depict figures, albeit in a profoundly kinaesthetic mode and in recent years Bourgeois has, sometimes, removed this plate from the series substituting *Alternative Plate / Ceiling Floating* in its place [77].

He Disappeared into Complete Silence raised Bourgeois' profile. It was reproduced in full in *The Tiger's Eye*[78] (March 1949) and in part in a profile in *The Magazine of Art*[79] (December 1948). In 1947 a copy was bought by the Museum of Modern Art, whose director Alfred H. Barr

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[73] Bourgeois joined the American Abstract Artists in 1954. She was also a member of other artists' organisations including the Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors and the Sculptors Guild.
[74] Mignon Nixon, 'Posing the Phallus' *October*. 92 (Spring, 2000) pp. 98-127.
[75] Lynn-Marie Somers discusses the feminist implications of Gemor in *"Ode a ma mere" Louise Bourgeois, Intersubjectivity and Embodied Feminism* (PhD thesis: State University of New York at Stony Brook, 2001). Bourgeois' limited production is one of the reasons why the print versions of this book vary in content, it seems she only bound sufficient copies for initial interest.
[76] See Wye (1994).
[77] This has happened several times, notably when the series has been reprinted, for instance, Bourgeois (1998) and Christiane Meyer-Thoss, *Louise Bourgeois* (Zurich: Amman Verlag, 1992) both omit *Two Personages*, but Wye (1982) contains the original version, Wye (1994) contains all versions of the prints including the substitute. Wye annotates each print with a recent statement if available.
[78] Marius Bewley, 'An Introduction to the work of Louise Bourgeois' *The Tiger's Eye* (vol. 1, issue 7, March 15, 1949) 89-92, reproduced in Anne Eden Gibson, *Issues in Abstract Expressionism – the Artist Run Periodicals*, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1990, pp. 177-80.
[78] Guilbaut, p. 80.
[79] *The Magazine of Art* (vol. 41, December 1948) p. 307.

was 'a friendly acquaintance'[80] and whose advice she had sought during the project's development.[81] These publications are little considered in the coffee-table histories of the New York scene. Anne Eden Gibson tells us that *The Tiger's Eye*, along with other 'little magazines' such as *Possibilities*, *Iconograph*, *Instead*, and *Modern Artists in America* formed the avant-garde press of what later became known as Abstract Expressionism and the New York School.[82] *The Tiger's Eye* was one of the most widely read of all the avant-garde magazines: it was subscribed to by a number of universities and circulated to cities beyond New York. It was distinguished by eclecticism: combining recognised masters with those just achieving reputations and refused to champion one point of view (unlike say *Partisan Review* or *Art News*).[83] To its editors, their refusal to establish a program to which contributors must conform *was* their avant-garde position. In its brief time (1947-9), *The Tiger's Eye* published most of the renegade Surrealists and most of those who became the Abstract Expressionists and, since the work and statements of the New York School appeared in the magazine frequently, Gibson considers that it was a vehicle for their ideas. By publishing in this magazine, Bourgeois placed herself again firmly at the centre of avant-garde practice in New York: in a journal that prided itself on both being in the centre and being non-prescriptive.[84] As we have seen Bourgeois carrying duality of nationality with her, so here she placed herself *in-between* the renegade Surrealists and the new young American generation just as she did by printing at *Atelier 17*.

By contrast, *The Magazine of Art*[85] (December 1948) was a commercial, monthly journal; with a wide circulation including subscribing artists and arts clubs all over the United States. Robert Goldwater took over the editorship in November 1947 and changed the magazine to reflect his personal interests in modern art. He redesigned and altered the magazine's editorial policy including more articles on modern architecture, Native American art and introducing a double page that profiled two artists, one per page. In February 1948, he profiled Willem de Kooning, before he had yet had a solo show in New York; in March the selected artists were Motherwell and Clyfford Still and so on. The choices were eclectic, including artists associated with geometric abstraction (American Abstract Artists) whose names have now largely been forgotten. In December, Bourgeois was profiled with a brief introduction and two illustrations from *He Disappeared into Complete Silence*. Goldwater orientated *The Magazine of Art* toward the debate of what modern art might be and the profile exposed Bourgeois' work to a wider

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[80] Wye (1994) p. 73.

[81] The 'publishing' of this artist's book is interesting for, as is often the case, it was not distributed through recognised channels. Fifty-four were announced but there is no evidence that the colour versions announced were ever assembled. Eleven copies were traced by Wye and of these three were purchased in the 1940s. The remaining eight were assembled by Bourgeois in the 1980s from extant plates and are non-identical.

[82] Gibson (1990) argues that 'avant-garde' is an acceptable term for these magazines because they all conform to Linick's attitude for 'avant-garde' magazines, all showing; firstly, a growing dissatisfaction with academic aesthetic standards, secondly, a corresponding desire to establish new criteria and thirdly, a specific and unfavourable reaction to the character of American society. See Anthony Linick, 'A history of the American Literary Avant-Garde, Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1965.

[83] Ibid., p. 26.

[84] Bourgeois' work appeared a second time in *The Tiger's Eye*, (issue 9, 1949: the last issue) illustration: 'Woman in the Process of Placing a Beam in a Bag'.

[85] *The Magazine of Art* (vol. 41, December 1948) p. 307.

audience placing her amongst those avant-garde figures who became the Abstract Expressionists.

Gibson reminds us that:

> The artists who are often thought of as Abstract Expressionists, such as William Baziotes, Arshile Gorky, Hans Hofmann, Willem de Kooning, Lee Krasner, Robert Motherwell, Barnet Newman, Richard Pousette-Dart, Jackson Pollock, Ad Reinhardt, Mark Rothko and Clyfford Still, did not think of themselves as such during the period 1946 to 1951.[86]

Bourgeois and the artists Gibson lists were positioned in the centre of the 'avant-garde' but not as part of a group. The time of *He Disappeared into Complete Silence* was a time of mêlée and debate. Whilst there were numerous artists organisations such as the 'Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors'[87] and 'American Abstract Artists',[88] these functioned to promote artists and their work, lobbying for sponsorship and attention in the wider cultural sphere. There were no official groups whose aimed to further ideas and debates between artists, as the Surrealists had done. New York artists relied on friendships and informal meeting places like *Atelier 17*. It was not until *Studio 35* and 'the Club' that artists wanting to discuss the furtherance of modern art had an established place to go. Bourgeois was putting herself in the thick of it by her choice of *Atelier 17* and her efforts to publish and promote her book. As we move forward into the fifties, and the development of concrete institutions like 'the Club', Bourgeois remains in the centre.

Bourgeois started to make her tall *Personages* (plates 21 and 22), that formed her first body of sculpture, between 1947 and 1951. Looking back it seems that by making sculpture Bourgeois stepped sideways, out of the fray that was the enthusiasm for American painting in the 1950s, but sculpture was a vital form in the 1940s: Calder, Lippold, Ferber and Smith were all exhibiting regularly, Giacometti's sculptures were surveyed at Pierre Matisse's gallery in 1948[89] and Bourgeois had become friends with another woman sculptor of her generation, Louise Nevelson.[90] Bourgeois' recollections suggest the *Personages* served to bring to her the family that she had left in France and so resolve her feelings of loneliness and abandonment. The height and narrowness of these works not only recall the primitive art that Goldwater studied and that was of such interest but also the skyscrapers of her habitat[91]. There are a number of possible sources for this imagery, we have noted the 'influential' precursors Picasso and Ernst,

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[86] Gibson, p. 1.

[87] The Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors was founded in 1940. Ashton and Guilbaut both discuss the cultural function of the group. Bourgeois joined and exhibited with them in mid fifties, except on one occasion as a guest in 1947.

[88] Founded in 1936, founder members gathered around Ibram Lassaw and included Ralph Rosenborg (who also attended the Artists Session at Studio 35).

[89] Pierre Matisse was another 'friendly acquaintance' and Bourgeois dined with him on a number of occasions in the late 1940s.

[90] Laurie Wilson dates their friendship to the mid forties, shortly after Nevelson's environmental *Circus* exhibition at Nierendorf Gallery. Laurie Wilson, p. 202.

[91] Bourgeois has always denied any connection between her work and primitive art and this may be another diversionary tactic, Anne Wagner concluded that, 'to make the primitive seem more bodily than pictorial or pictographic, more like a process than a sign: this is Bourgeois prehistory', Anne M. Wagner, 'Bourgeois' Prehistory, or the Ransom of Fantasies' *Oxford Art Journal* (vol. 22, no. 2, 1999) see also Thomas McEvilley 'History and Prehistory in the work of Louise Bourgeois' in Weiermair, Peter, (ed.) *Louise Bourgeois* (Zurich and Frankfurt am Main: Editions Stemmle, 1995).

Paalen's work on native American imagery and its diffusion through Surrealism, the little magazines and *The Magazine of Art*. It is well known that, in part, this series was developed on the roof of Bourgeois' New York apartment with skyscrapers and water cooling towers (seen in *He Disappeared into Complete Silence*) all around her. Nothing stronger evidence of the idea that Bourgeois was drawing from her immediate milieu than the image of her pausing from work and staring across the cityscape.

These wooden figures are silent, enigmatic, presences and call to the contemporary work of Noguchi, Smith and Nevelson who were also titling their work *Personages*,[92] and who were also using an abstracted sculpture to describe figures and emotional states. Laurie Wilson has traced the appearances of looming vertical presences in the work of advanced painters such as Pollock, Still, Gottlieb and Lam and in sculptors close to either these painters or to the Surrealists.[93] She observes that by the end of the 1940s there was a positive 'flood' of sculpted totemic personages. Wilson links Bourgeois' prints to work she might have seen exhibited and to Attilio Salemme, who in 1947 worked at and visited a frame shop next door to Bourgeois' home.[94] The evidence Wilson presents contests the claims of independence of Bourgeois, and her contemporaries, showing their shared concerns, and suggesting the profound effect of the immediate milieu on the form of Bourgeois' work.[95]

Wayne Andersen's explanation of the totem or personage in this period is pertinent:

> The concept of the mysterious totem or personage distinguished by its undefined sense of presence emerged in the late forties in American sculpture. ... In the mid-forties Noguchi's 'Kouros'... and Lippold's 'Primordial Figure'... responded to the personage idea that Ferber, Lipton, and Smith would develop at the turn of the decade. Infused with the surrealists' idea of the undifferentiated and undefinable – the power of the unconscious and of the dream – the totemic personage idea proliferated among American sculptors, incorporating the sense of loneliness and alienation that had been conditioned by post-second world war psychology... With the personage concept of the figure, the literalness of most sculptural imagery of the forties became subordinated to a formal generalization of a pervasive mood, generated by a presence rather than an emotional display.[96]

Andersen could be describing the mournful figures of Bourgeois containing the literal agony of her story within the 'formal generalization' generated by 'presence'. Further evidence for Bourgeois' community with her peers is provided by Marius Bewley in his introduction to *He Disappeared in Complete Silence*. Observing how Bourgeois' 'parables' of frustration interacted with the buildings in the etchings, Bewley describes how the loneliness and isolation that came

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[92] David Smith *Personage from Stove City* (1946), in *Possibilities* (no. 1, Winter 1948). See Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Sculpture of David Smith (1906-65) a Catalogue Raisonné* (New York and London, Garland Publishing Inc. 1977). Isamu Noguchi, *Figure* (1945), *Figure* (1946), in Grove and Botnick, *The Sculpture of Isamu Noguchi*, (New York: Garland Press, 1980).

[93] Laurie Wilson has researched this most thoroughly.

[94] The geographical connection Laurie Wilson makes between the two artists and the formal relationship she observes in their work is furthered by the wide exposure that Salemme's work received: seven solo shows between 1945 and 1955. See Laurie Wilson, p. 201. Further, Bourgeois' archive includes a profile portrait annotated 'Salemme', Archives of American art, Smithsonian Institution, Louise Bourgeois papers (reels 45 and 90, frame 520).

[95] The importance of milieu was raised by Bourgeois in her question titled the *Genesis of the Work of Art* for the Artists Session at Studio 35 in 1950.

[96] Wayne Andersen, *American Sculpture in Process* (Boston: New York Graphic Society) p. 87.

from each protagonist losing his power to communicate was a common concern for Bourgeois' generation:

> This difficulty of communication that springs from the individual's isolation in himself has always been present in society in some degree, but it remained for this century to confront its special fury. For a good many years its has been the aesthetic concern with which artist have been most occupied, but to let it rest on a plane of verbal or visual strategy is both to underestimate and misunderstand it. It is really a problem of cultural and spiritual desiccation... The heart of culture is lost, and unity is superimposed, an embellishment from the outside. As an integrating substitute for culture, politics cannot ease loneliness ... It is inevitable that our art should offer, either directly or indirectly a comment on this cultural exhaustion, and on the human situation which arises from it, for it is the business of art to present an experience in its organic totality.[97]

Bewley's reading is a long way from contemporary interpretations of Bourgeois' work. Bourgeois was on the pulse of contemporary concerns, a pattern I contend she has successfully repeated and it is the *currency* of her work: how personage-becomes-latex-becomes-performance-becomes-installation that is obscured by the narratives of isolation, individualism and timelessness. Bewley hints at the issues pressing in 1949: the total experience of art, the sense of cultural desiccation and failure, and the failure of politics. He goes on to elaborate the loneliness and isolation that each print and parable speaks but always connects Bourgeois to the wider debate and the shared concerns of her fellow artists.

Bourgeois' practice, that emerged from her life, her home, took on the tactics and strategies of the avant-garde around her and it is my contention that, far from being isolated from her generation, she was as central to it as was possible for a woman artist to be. Bourgeois *did* feel deeply isolated but she was not alone in this, and her isolation was exacerbated by being a woman, but she was not the only woman artist. Her circumstances may have felt heightened by her emigration, but both the standard texts on the period and the revisionists concur that disillusion with society, politics, art and culture, was intensely felt by the community of artists that Bourgeois was among. Guilbaut, for instance, notes an alienation from politics and class in New York artists that Motherwell articulated, estranged from the workers and from their own class (the bourgeoisie), 'the creator found himself, alienated, in no man's land'.[98] Personified tower blocks and towering statues inhabited Bourgeois no man's land. Bourgeois' work is canonically modern in form and structure (assemblages, constructions, personages) and in transmitting a non-specific, expressive, figurative subject. From 'complete shutdown' at the beginning of the decade Bourgeois' maturing voice, like that of her contemporaries, was of emotion: a barely restrained anger and a deep sorrow. Emotion contained by the taut formal language of her time, a language that became the renowned inarticulacy of Abstract Expressionism. Bourgeois shared the goal of the New York school as Goldwater recalled that 'to make the work itself the bearer of emotion – this was not attained without dedication and struggle... This is a lyric, not an epic art.'[99]

Feeling isolated was a symptom of her subject position as a modern artist in New York after the war. When Bourgeois says that she was not a member of the New York school, or any group

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[97] Bewley, in Gibson, pp. 177-80.
[98] Guilbaut, p. 80.

she is simply stating a position that all those artists held and shared: they were each isolated, angry, individuals frustrated in a politically barren culture. In a short statement in *Possibilities*, Rosenberg wrote:

> Art is the country of these painters... Art to them is rather the standpoint for a private revolt against the materialist tradition that does surround them. They are not a school, they have no common aim, not even the common tension that comes from rejecting the validity of the same art history.... Attached neither to a community nor to one another, these painters experience a unique loneliness of a depth that is reached perhaps nowhere else in the world... Is not the definition of true loneliness, that one is lonely not in relation to people but in relation to things as well? ... At the same time, however, the very extremity of their isolation forces upon a kind of optimism, an impulse to believe in their ability to dissociate some personal essence of their experience and rescue it as the beginning of a new world. For each is fatally aware that only what he constructs himself will ever be real to him.[100]

Rosenberg, his language rich with both the terminology of conflict and with the ideas of Existentialism that I shall elaborate below, frames these painters as isolated individuals for whom the struggle of art is a revolt: an individual philosophical uprising. In this context, Bourgeois' insistence on her isolation seems almost a membership card in itself.

I feel this way, I feel that way and we all feel a bit the same way

In 1950, *Studio 35* closed its doors for the last time.[101] Beginning in 1948, the lecture series that was its core had been a short-lived but vital centre that nurtured New York School thought and its founders then helped to found the Club in 1949. To mark its closure a three-day Artists' Session[102] was convened; Bourgeois was one of the invitees, again placing her at the centre of avant-garde activity in the New York School. The transcript was published in *Modern Artists in America* in 1952 and makes fascinating reading of that kind of circular discussion that even when moderated – as in this instance – is so typical of fine artists and gives life to descriptions of the Eighth Street Club and the Cedar Tavern. The moment of creation of a work of art, its finish point and the possibility of acknowledging themselves as a community were three recurrent themes. On day three, there is a tacit acceptance of themselves as a 'group'. Barr asked whether they had a name or found acceptable one of those already in print ('Abstract

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[99] Goldwater (1960) p. 18.

[100] Harold Rosenberg, 'Introduction to Six American Artists' *Possibilities* (1947/8: 75) reprinted in Gibson (1990) pp. 246-7.

[101] Studio 35 evolved from a series of evening lectures that were part of the program of the short lived 'The Subjects of the Artist School' started in 1948 by William Baziotes, Motherwell, Rothko and Hare and later joined by Barnet Newman. When the school failed, the lecture series was continued for another season by the New York University Department of Art Education as Studio 35. It was when this series ended that the artists' sessions were convened. See Sandler (1970), the transcript is printed in Gibson (1990).

[102] April 21-23 1950, the artist that attended one or more days were, Baziotes, Janice Biala, Bourgeois, James Brooks, De Kooning, Jimmy Ernst, Ferber, Gottlieb, Peter Grippe, Hare, Hans Hofmann, Weldon Kees, Ibram Lassaw, Norman Lewis, Richard Lippold, Seymour Lipton, Newman, Richard Pousette-Dart, Ad Reinhardt, Ralph Rosenborg, Theodorus Stamos, Hedda Sterne, David Smith and Bradley Walker Tomlin, Barr (the only non-artist to participate), Richard Lippold and Motherwell. Robert Goodnough edited the original transcript removing up to half and it was passed to each artist to edit their own contributions before being printed in *Modern Artists in America* (1950).

Expressionist', 'Abstract-Symbolist', 'Intra-Subjectivist'[103]) and his prompt provoked conflicting views. Ralph Rosenborg said: 'we should have a name through the years' whilst Motherwell felt that, 'even if there is anyway of giving ourselves a name, we will all still be called abstract artists' and De Kooning closed the session with, 'it is disastrous to name ourselves.'[104] Bourgeois was silent in this discussion, in fact, in the published account she said very little: a far cry from her public persona now. According to Motherwell, the transcript was drastically edited and then each artist also edited their own portion prior to publication, so we cannot know what Bourgeois might have contributed that was then edited out. She is a silent presence, like one of her *Personages*, but very present in relation to the artists and contentions of the New York School.[105]

The Artists' Sessions at *Studio 35* have come to represent a pivotal moment of self-recognition, of emergence, and to some, the beginning of the decline in the mythology of the New York School. The question of community can be seen before the Sessions, in the articles of the 'little magazines' and in *The Magazine of Art* 1949 symposium 'The State of American Art'[106] where Goldwater invited sixteen critics to consider whether one could identify 'an American art' in current practice. Goldwater's symposium showed a clear awareness of the centre of the creative process moving from Paris. The position of the intellectual in America was different from mainland Europe because post-war angst could not conjoin with opposition movements (both because of the history of individualism in America and the advent of cold war McCarthyism). Instead, depoliticized anxiety became a rhetoric of the human condition: individualism, arising out of mythology, expressionism and Surrealism. The speaking of personal truth became an *ideological* act.[107] When Rosenberg wrote, 'Art is the country of these painters... Art to them is rather the standpoint for a private revolt against the materialist tradition',[108] he reflected a de-politicised need for Americanness. Rosenberg's classic essay 'American Action Painting' that characterised the new art as specifically American, was published in 1952: a year after Bourgeois was interviewed by the McCarthy tribunals and took American citizenship. Bourgeois remembers De Kooning shouting out 'Goddamit, I'm still a foreigner!' at the Club when lauded as the all-American painter: his application for citizenship had been denied.[109] De Kooning was tangibly rejected on the level of citizenship, Bourgeois retains her Frenchness, both practiced an American art. As the idea of an American art

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[103] A direct reference to Sartre. Sandler writes, 'art which was extremely subjective could be intra-subjective, that is, apprehended by others, and ethical.' Irving Sandler, *The New York School* (New York, Hagerstown, San Francsico and London: Harper and Row, 1978) p. 27.

[104] Robert Goodnough ed., 'Artists Sessions at Studio 35' *Modern Artists in America* (1950), pp. 9-22. Reprinted in Gibson, 1990, pp. 314-44.

[105] Sandler (1978)writes that it was at the artists sessions at Studio 35 that the idea of a protest against the Metropolitan Museum was proposed: the 'Irascibles', as they came to be known, were eighteen painters and ten sculptors one of whom was Bourgeois.

[106] *The Magazine of Art* (vol. 42, no. 3, March 1949). Just one month later Goldwater participated in the 'Western Round table on Modern art' at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art which gathered artists and writers to discuss contemporary art production.

[107] For a very brief outline see Harrison and Wood, 1992. Ashton and Guilbaut both provide an excellent analysis.

[108] Harold Rosenberg, 'Introduction to Six American Artists' *Possibilities* (1947/8: 75), reprinted in Gibson, 1990, pp. 246-7.

[109] Unpublished interview, 1966.

emerged, it was theorized as going forward alone and owing nothing to anyone, as no longer needing the great tradition of French and European art. As Barnet Newman wrote, 'here in America, some of us, free from the weight of European culture, are finding the answer.'[110] So, Bourgeois' insistence upon independence is not only shared within the New York art scene but was *how* they framed themselves and *how* American art was presented to the world.

Neither Bourgeois' famously 'ferocious independence', nor her 'isolation', exclude her from being a part of the community that has become known as the New York School: a community that as Goldwater recalled, 'lived a history, germinated a mythology and produced a hagiology.' Bourgeois' determined independence is symptomatic of the attitudes of her milieu (since the Club artists repudiated the term Abstract Expressionism[111] in panel discussions in 1952). Bourgeois' insistence on her originality, particularly regarding her early work places her within the idea of avant-garde as it is classically framed by Poggioli. It is the additional feature of refusing *community*, not simply the alienation from the bourgeoisie and working classes which is typically avant-garde behaviour, but additionally refusing the community of the avant-garde, (even if they all did feel a bit the same way), this refusal is specific to New York artists at this moment.

The 'Club' began its Friday night meetings in 1949,[112] Bourgeois was an early attendee[113] and between 1953 and 1956 participated in the 'Stable Annuals': the salon of the group. Of the meetings Bourgeois recalls 'It was always a matter of, you know, I feel this way, I feel that way and we all feel a bit the same way and all we can do is to translate it into interesting work' which they did.[114] Gibson has made the unusual step of including Bourgeois in the community of New York School artists:

> The sculpture of artists such as Louise Bourgeois, Herbert Ferber, Peter Grippe, Ibram Lassaw, Richard Lippold, Seymour Lipton, Louise Nevelson, Theodor Roszak and David Smith deserve special mention in this regard... Writers have shied away from calling it 'Abstract Expressionist', feeling that it was awkward, and even slightly ridiculous, to categorise sculpture in this way. Most have preferred to call this work 'the sculpture of the Abstract Expressionist period' or have described it as 'linked to Abstract Expressionism'. However, these sculptors' expressionistic handling in this period, their frequent use of biomorphic forms, and above all, their involvement with content and attitudes similar to those of the Abstract Expressionistic painters as seen in their participation in these periodicals, makes it appropriate to include them in this study as members of the New York School.[115]

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[110] Barnet Newman, 'The Sublime is Now' *The Tiger's Eye* (vol. 1, no. 6, December 1948) reprinted in Harrison and Wood, 1992, pp. 572-4.
[111] Sandler (1970) traces the usage of Abstract Expressionism. Barr used it in 1929 to describe Kandinsky's work, in 1946 Robert Coates of *The New Yorker* used it to characterise the paintings of a number of American artists and it was popularised in a series of panel discussions at the club in 1952 organised by the 'abstract expressionist' artists themselves, but those artists also repudiated the term.
[112] Also called the Eighth Street Club or the Artists Club. De Kooning, Kline, Reinhardt, Tworkov began renting a meeting place two doors away from Studio 35, its main activity was weekly panel discussions held on Friday nights and, for the first five years, round table discussions on Wednesday nights.
[113] Unpublished interview, 1966, Bourgeois did not deny being an early member when asked in 1966, but Philip Pavia's club records cannot confirm this.
[114] Unpublished interview, 1966.
[115] Gibson, p. 2-3.

Gibson point out that certain artists were excluded from the group by writers and historians because they were not member of the social group anchored at the Club or they produced work that lacked one characteristic deemed necessary, large size for instance, or the apparent spontaneity of paint that excludes both printmakers and sculptors. I believe Gibson is correct to consider the aspects that brought New York artists together: expressionistic handling and shared content and attitudes. Our historical perspective has been framed by the literary debate between Greenberg and Rosenberg: Rosenberg emphasizing the existential drama of the art of the New York school and Greenberg the formal and technical innovations. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood summarize the outcome of this debate succinctly as the triumph of formalism through Greenberg's ideas at the cost of political and existential commitment. Though less political by this time, Rosenberg's 'action' of 'action painting' contained the possibility of revolution being kept alive, at least in the imagination. If we move away from the dominant focus on method, on painting and formalism, and recognise, as Rosenberg says, 'they [the artworks] are above all the work of individuals of the creative process in the United States', it is possible to concentrate upon the shared position and Bourgeois' inclusion seems suddenly obvious.[116] From the evidence of the 'creative process' and the community of the Artists Sessions and the Club, Bourgeois was clearly a part of this group and this may give us more insights into her practice than the concentration on her isolation and independence has done.

I am not a Surrealist, I am an Existentialist

Bourgeois has said repeatedly, 'I am not a Surrealist, I am an Existentialist';[117] is this another strategic manoeuvre? Jean Paul Sartre arrived in New York in 1945 as the correspondent for *Combat* and lectured at the Carnegie Recital hall. He filled it 'to the rafters' and half the audience was 'people from the 57th Street art world.'[118] One is free to act but one must act to be free: his message struck a chord with the politically frustrated art circle and the term Existentialism began to be heard.[119] Bourgeois knew of Sartre's work directly; exhibiting 'La Nausée' in 1945 and through criticism. For instance, Ashton quotes from *The Partisan Review*, 'Sartre has defined his theatre as one of situations not of characters.'[120] That Bourgeois and the artists around her were thinking of relations and situations, not characters, bears on the gloomy *Personage* series which, when exhibited in 1949, was installed so as to explore relations between enigmatic figures in situations.

Ashton and Guilbaut examine the de-politicisation of American intellectuals and artists showing how, as the Cold War loomed and McCarthy's power waxed, interest in Freud, Jung and Sartre functioned to provide a philosophical underpinning for a new aesthetic and ideological position

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[116] Rosenberg, in Gibson p. 246.
[117] Marie-Laure Bernadac, *Louise Bourgeois* (Paris: Flammarion, 1996) p. 28. Evidence of Bourgeois familiarity with existential ideas is provided by her inclusion of Jean-Paul Sartre's *La Nausée* (1938) in her exhibition of French wartime documents and resistance writing. Her sculpture title *No Exit* is also thought to refer to Sartre's play of the same name.
[118] John Meyers journal entry, in Sawin, p. 376.
[119] Ashton cites many of the references to Sartre and indeed Heidegger in this period in *The Partisan Review*, *The Tiger's Eye*, *Possibilities*, *The Magazine of Art* and, of course, Rosenberg's existential analyses of 'Abstract Expressionist' artists.
[120] *Partisan Review* (New York: March/April 1947) in Ashton, p. 178.

based upon the subjectivity of the individual. Harrison and Wood, summarizing the period conclude, 'Without exception the American artists who attempted to articulate their project at this time spoke of myth and transcendence, the roots of art in the unconscious and of the art itself as a solitary act. In the same breath they would characteristically speak of the hostility of the age and the traps of any sense of community and security.'[121] Bourgeois did not speak. When Bourgeois recalls this time though, it is in precisely these terms. Further, in chapter three Bourgeois uses a narrative of the traps of community in relation to her involvement with the feminist art movement in the 1970s.

Between 1946-1950 Bourgeois' work was changing rapidly and she was participating with those artists around her in a frenzy of writing, painting, printing, exhibiting and talking. At the end of this short period came the inevitable recognition of themselves as a group, or rather, a school of individuals. Their determination to be individuals, acting alone, illustrated the permeation of Sartre's brand of Existentialism into the New York scene. Just as we have seen a slippage and transformation from programmatic Surrealist positions into a more indistinct notion of subjective practice in the production of *intuitive art* by American artists in the 1940s, similarly, the precise details of Sartre's reading of Heidegger was not important to the artist and writers excited by his ideas and looking for a philosophical touchstone to underpin their need for a *committed* and *engaged* intuitive art. For Bourgeois and her contemporaries, Existentialism was less a philosophy than a sensibility: a way to frame a practice that was deeply intuitive, formal and without programme. Sartre provided an interpretation of subjective experience that was centred on self assertion through action, passion and commitment. Willem De Kooning, whose opinions engaged Bourgeois in the Club discussions, said:

> Some painters including myself, do not care what chair they are sitting on. It does not even have to be a comfortable one. They are too nervous to find out where they ought to sit. They do not want to 'sit in style.' Rather they have found that painting, any style of painting – to be painting at all, in fact – is a way of living today, a style of living so to speak. It is exactly in its uselessness that it is free.[122]

De Kooning translates the restless anxiety of *La 'Nausée*[123] where there was no situation of comfort, no easy chair, and posits art as a way to act to reach freedom and to act with conscience. Committed literature was for Sartre, first and foremost, committed to freedom. De Kooning disseminated his position through his strength of presence at the Club: he cast the artist as open, spiritually independent, anxious and committed to act through art-making. Art then, becomes an act of living, a way of living and one's actions through art describe one's individuation.[124] Formulated as both deeply subjective and able to be apprehended by others: 'intra-subjective', art becomes *the* free act. It is the creation of a man as he wants to be and as

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[121] Harrison and Wood (1992) p. 550.
[122] Willem De Kooning, 'Statement' *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art (New York)* (spring, 1951).
[123] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, (London: Penguin, 2000) trans. Robert Baldick, Penguin Books, originally published as *La Nausée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938).
[124] See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Basics Writings* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001) and *Being and Nothingness* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998). The briefest summary of Sartre's position is in Sandler (1978) whilst an excellent reading can be found in Mary Warnock, *Existentialism* (Oxford: OPUS Oxford University Press, 1970) see also Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

he thinks he ought to be. Consequently, this private choice is made on behalf of all mankind and existentialist art is a moral act. Bourgeois resolving fears, pleasures, anger and her relations with her family into the activity of art, is figured as committing life into art as an act of freedom, an active, ethical choice. Existentialism describes Bourgeois' practice in a way which accurately represents her emphasis upon the act (pouring, cutting) and her active, committed, bellicose engagement. 'Exorcism' the populist, coffee-table speak for what academics discuss as the repeated return of the repressed, only entered the vocabulary of Bourgeois' art much later.

Sartre asserted that subjectivity was evidenced in one's actions because the surface was reality, therefore one literally made oneself through one's choices: through one's projects. It is through one's acts and products that the self becomes visible: appearance *as* reality. As I have mentioned, Rosenberg expressed this beautifully, 'For each [artist] is painfully aware that only what he constructs himself will ever be real to him'[125] and again in *American Action Painting* he wrote:

> Painting could now be reduced to that equipment which the artist needed for an activity that would be alternative to both usefulness and idleness. Guided by visual and somatic memories of paintings he had seen or made – memories which he did his best to keep from intruding into his consciousness – he gesticulated upon the canvas and watched for what each novelty would declare him or his art to be.[126]

Bourgeois, by fabricating presences that resolved the decisions she had made – to leave France and her family and in one case, *Portrait of CY* (1947-9), coming to terms with a major argument was defining herself: making herself visible to herself.[127] An attempt, in the hope of, as Rosenberg says, 'future self-recognition'. Seen in this way, as quintessentially engaged art, Bourgeois' practice seems to be less one of therapy than of self-creation. An autobiographical mode in the extreme: Bourgeois literally fabricating her history and her choices, her children, her parents, her brother, her fears and her fights, through drawing, printing, carving and assemblage.

More than anyone else at the time, Rosenberg's essays show the infusion of Existentialist thought:

> A painting that is an act is inseparable from the biography of the artist. The painting itself is a 'moment' in the adulterated mixture of his life – whether 'moment' means the actual minutes taken up with spotting the canvas or the entire duration of a lucid drama conducted in sign language. The act-painting is of the same metaphysical substance as the artists' existence. The new painting has broken down every distinction between art and life.[128]

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[125] Rosenberg, 1947/8, reprinted in Gibson (1990) pp. 246-7.
[126] Rosenberg, 'American Action painting' *Art News* (no.51, New York, December 1952) p. 22. Extract reprinted in Harrison and Wood (1992) p. 583.
[127] It emerged in the 1990s that CY was Catherine Yarrow, whom Bourgeois met and exhibited alongside in the 1940s (*The Women* at Art of This Century). According to Bourgeois, she and Yarrow argued. Yarrow was sympathetic to the surrealists and made ceramics and was not, according to Bourgeois, a serious artist. *Portrait of CY* is a pole with two holes; a rectangular horizontal letterbox goes right through the pole and might be an eye space or empty head. The lower hollow is filled with nails as if thoroughly 'shut up'.
[128] Harold Rosenberg, 'American Action Painting' in Harrison and Wood, 1992, pp. 581-4.

He could be describing Bourgeois' practice.

Bourgeois had three solo exhibitions in quick succession at the Peridot Gallery (1949, 1950 and 1953), the latter show consisting mainly of drawings. In 1951, Bourgeois exhibited sculpture at the Whitney annual for the first time. She had, by now, identified herself clearly with her New York home, American art, and the American experience. At this moment though, the Goldwater family took the long sea passage and returned to France for the first time in eleven years. Bourgeois began to make assembled pole figures, such as *Memling Dawn* (1951)[129] a series of 'spiral women' and to group her pole figures together such as *Quarantania* (1948-53).

Goldwater included Bourgeois' *Quarantania* in *What is Modern Sculpture?* (1969) saying:

> By 1950 sculptors made assemblage their own... Bourgeois' 'Quarantania 1', takes the method of assemblage at its most literal. Each of the wooden elements, painted white or blue, is a separate unit anchored in a base that serves as common ground for a concentrated gathering of carved abstract shapes. Similar but not identical, their rhythms and relations give the work its formal interest. At the same time, as the attenuated, organic curves suggest, there is a symbolic reference. Here is a human group, its members alike but various, leaning towards one another in an intensity of feeling that unites them even as it leaves each one silent and alone.[130]

Assemblage, the modern sculptors answer to the dilemma of carving or modelling, was the avant-garde position Goldwater claimed for his wife. If painters acted upon their canvases then assemblage was the closest equivalent practice sculptors could find. Just as we can question the spontaneity of 'action painting', so Bourgeois' assemblage *Quarantania* was a later accumulation of previously carved elements, each of which had been exhibited separately in 1949, hence the dating: 1948-53.[131] In the next chapter I shall consider assemblage in more detail in reference to Bourgeois' work of the 1960s. In the 1960s, when Bourgeois said that she was taught a 'ferocious independence'[132] when studying in Paris perhaps she revealed the lesson which (though imparted in the post-cubist modernism of Paris) she actually learnt in a second engagement with modernism at the School of New York.

Conclusion

From the turn of the decade the New York School's first generation divided into those who were commercially successful and those who were not. As the possibility of living off one's art became real the fragile sense of community began to shatter. For Bourgeois, this meant that although she had been a part of the Artists' Session at *Studio 35* and consequently joined the, now infamous, 'Irascibles' to protest against the Metropolitan Museum of Art, she was not represented in Motherwell's *The School of New York* a year later(Perls Gallery, Beverley Hills) which showed seventeen painters. Bourgeois quickly fell away from the nucleus of activity she

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[129] Reproduced in Wye (1982) p. 62.
[130] Robert Goldwater, *What is Modern Sculpture?* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1969) p. 97.
[131] Indeed, this sculpture has appeared in several versions, notably with cloth sometimes covering its base and after its later bronze casting three pendulous forms now hang from the central personage.
[132] Unpublished interview, 1966.

had been a part of.[133] Instead, Bourgeois, Goldwater and the family left for France with Robert's Fulbright scholarship. Bourgeois' father died in 1951 and the family travelled to and from France frequently in the next five years, Bourgeois keeping a studio in Paris until 1955.

Bourgeois did not have another commercial solo show until 1964.[134] She was not inactive in these years, far from it: her list of group exhibitions is exhaustive.[135] In 1966 Bourgeois said of her wooden assemblages, 'as long as these constructions were made it excited no interest except a friendly interest in my friends.'[136] Although we need to be cautious about her statements, such apparent frankness implies that if Rubin were right and Bourgeois had ploughed her own furrow, she would probably never have been 'rediscovered'. We also know that in the mid sixties Bourgeois remained hesitant about casting her work because of the cost.[137] Bourgeois gained her first teaching post in 1960, when her children had grown up but long after those artists with whom she had debated so earnestly in 1950. David Smith, on the other hand, was able to produce twenty sculptures a year by 1952, expecting a financial return on his investment, but by 1962, with the 'Voltri' series, he made twenty sculptures in one month. Only many years later has Bourgeois been able to command the economy to utilize this kind of industrial faction in her practice. Right up to the end of the 1960s when Bourgeois first had the opportunity to carve at Pietrasanta her work remained of a scale and scope that required no assistance or support.

Absence may have played a part in Bourgeois' career trailing off in the early 1950s. Robert Storr suggests that there were personal reasons:

> I think the attention she got then scared her. She was very much a person on the scene. She was the artist wife of Robert Goldwater. She was a sophisticated member of the visual and literary culture. She'd had three gallery shows. But then her father died and she went into a tailspin.[138]

Storr is a little over-simplistic: Bourgeois' third Peridot show was two years after her father's death. Alternatively, Harrison and Wood contend that the triumph of American painting was a triumph of nationalism expressed through formal and technical innovation at the cost of the ideological commitment of Existentialism and the subjectivity of Surrealism. Framed thus, Bourgeois aligns more with Rosenberg's subjective and existential position and it was this that became concealed as the hagiology of Abstract Expressionism was written.

So what of the 'influence of Surrealism' on Bourgeois? Whitney Chadwick has observed the similarity between Bourgeois' *Femme Maison* motif (plate 23), and Masson's *Mannequin* whose head is enclosed within a birdcage (plate 24). This work opened the 1938 *Exposition*

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[133] See Sandler (1970) p. 269 for his discussion of the failings of democracy, openness and community at the turn of the 1950s.
[134] Stable Gallery, New York (January, 1964).
[135] Bourgeois established an antiquarian bookshop, *Erasmus Books*. Bourgeois' joined and exhibited with a number of artists' organisations and submitted to the Whitney Annual juried exhibition.
[136] Unpublished interview, 1966. The comment was said of *Le main Aimée* which I have not been able to trace. It is described by Bourgeois as being an open box with presents in it and by the interviewer as being close to the tall early figures he had previously been shown.
[137] Unpublished interview, 1966.
[138] Robert Storr in Liz Jobey, 'The Confessions of Louise Bourgeois' *The Guardian Weekend* (May 16, 1998) p. 18.

Internationale du Surréalisme that, as we know, Bourgeois studied.[139] It was part of a striking display, Sawin writes:

> Visitors found themselves in a corridor lined with mannequins poised beneath street signs, provocatively decked out like prostitutes beside their doorways along the rue St.-Denis. The head of one was encased in a birdcage, another was draped in a widow's weeds; one body was covered with tiny spoons, another with scorpions; one cried crystal tears, another held a lobster as a telephone receiver.[140]

Did Bourgeois appropriate Masson's idea? There are other possible sources: we have already mentioned Peret's writings, in 1939 he wrote an article on dolls with heads of imagined, never-to-be-seen castles. Before this, Bourgeois had been overawed by Picasso's work, the Minotaur also bisects the figure and Picasso's depictions show narrative situations, the intimate lives of his Minotaurs. Half-man half-bull the Minotaur appealed to Picasso's Surrealist circle for both its bizarre juxtaposition and for typifying the animal drives and desires of man. Bourgeois' *Femme Maison* motif sits *in-between* Masson's brutish encaged, naked doll, Peret's dreamlike metamorphoses and Picasso's situated, narrative half-things. Clearly in relation to all three, *Femme Maison* intimates Baxandall's active positioning not passive 'influence'.

I contend that Picasso provided Bourgeois' primary engagement with modernism in the figure of a modern artist as expressive, repetitive and a master of symbolic language. In an interview in 1968 Bourgeois praised Alexander Calder as 'the inventor of a whole line of work.'[141] She continues:

> And – well, we will have to establish a vocabulary of forms in the 20th century. But is it Tanguy? Is it Miró? Who invented the bone shape, you know? I'm not sure. I know that Tanguy did something different with it than did Calder. But I don't think that Calder is important because of his shape that looks like Miró. I think he is important because his three dimensional creatures, they move from the waist, and from the shoulders, you know there is that movement... Well, the history of form is everything. And the ambition of artist today is really to use a form that is theirs. In the vocabulary of forms of the 20th century I would like to have a small part. Everything is there.[142]

Bourgeois' comments suggest an awareness of her practice beyond her psychological narratives and in terms of a succession of great innovators. In these terms, Bourgeois craves to find her own form and join this vocabulary, as Picasso did.

Henri Michaux was well known in New York in the 1940s, interviewed about his own influences, Michaux replied,

> I admire the Americans less, Pollock and Toby but they created a climate in which I could express myself. They are instigators. They gave me *la grande permission* – yes, yes, that's very good, *la grande permission*. Just as one values the surrealists less for what they wrote than for the permission they gave everybody to write whatever comes into their heads. But I don't think very much about influences. You enjoy listening to peoples

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[139] *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*, Galerie des Beaux-Arts (Paris, 1938). Whitney Chadwick, in 'An Infinite play of empty Mirrors' in *Mirror Images, Women Surrealism and Self-Representation*, Chadwick, Whitney, Ed, Cambridge Mass. And London, MIT Press, 1998, p. 17. Bourgeois saw this exhibition a number of times but even if she had not, Man Ray's photograph of *Mannequin* was reproduced in *Paris Soir*, see Sawin, P. 5.

[140] Sawin, p. 4.

[141] Colette Roberts interview, 1968. Transcript pp. 32-3.

[142] Ibid.

> voices in the street but they don't solve your problem for you, when something is good it distracts you from your problem.[143]

Michaux's notion of *la grande permission* is useful. After struggling to find her voice within the dominant style of post-cubist abstraction in which she trained, Bourgeois experienced 'complete shutdown'. It is as if all of Bourgeois' early, pre-maternity, faith in her post-Picasso modernism evaporated with the morning mist and she plunged as if from her own drawings off the roof of her building into the unknown chaos of New York cultural life. In the 1940s Bourgeois found herself meeting those famous names of French intellectual life, many of whom were Surrealists. Gaining a footing in the art-scene, and beginning a new series of pictographic type paintings, Bourgeois entered the frenzy of the post war years with *la grande permission* from Picasso, from Surrealist positions and supported by Existentialism. Her practice altered quickly and radically: permission to deform, or conjoin the figure with architecture, permission to substitute the elongated buildings around her for the human form. When Bourgeois returned to France it was as a something she might never have recognised, a mother, a sculptor – not a painter – an artist no longer struggling to speak but possessing an articulate and idiosyncratic voice, honed at the frontier of the 'avant-garde'.

I am not denying Chadwick's observation but trying to point out that the relationship of 'influence' is problematic. Chadwick has found an apparently clear case but, with little effort, we have seen at least two other metamorphoses of the figure that Bourgeois was likely to be aware of and there are other examples. More pertinent than 'influence' to the rapid transformation Bourgeois' work underwent is the sense of conflict: she was fighting to be noticed. Bourgeois' sculptural utterance is more like *push off* than the *pull* of influence. It is more like fighting for space from the father figures of art history who landed on the doorstep. Bourgeois commenced upon engaging with the strategies of the avant-garde as she saw it, the American generation and the French refugees, so she set about making work at *Atelier 17* despite Hayter. Bourgeois positioned her work in particular journals and participated in certain social discourses using them to support her work philosophically. Existentialism was framed in the language of conflict and sublimated a feeling of revolt into an art of commitment and anxiety. Picasso gave her a model for a career, to become a *master* of ones subject, painting of 'what is true', and his repetition, his variations on a theme, are all foundations for Bourgeois' practice providing the structure behind the overt Surrealist, feminist or post-modern motifs in her work. Bourgeois' New York experience developed her visual phraseology and honed her struggle into a series of strategies.

Bourgeois' 'links to Surrealism' will not go away, for the links are as much about economics as about 'influence'. For instance, London's Tate Modern Gallery mounted *Surrealism, Desire Unbound* (2001-2), surveying Surrealism through the lens of 'desire'. The exhibition ended with a room containing work by Dorothea Tanning and Bourgeois who, born one year apart (Tanning in 1910, Bourgeois 1911) were situated by the curators as the living messengers of Surrealism, bringing it forward to the contemporary scene. Exhibited was work made by Bourgeois in the

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[143] Michaux to John Ashberry in Catherine de Zegher (Ed.)*Untitled Passages*, at The Drawing Center New York (London: Merrell Publishing Ltd., 2000) p. 164.

1960s; including *Avenza* (1968-9) and *Fillette* (1968) alongside soft sculptures by Tanning of similar dates. It could have been the work of a single artist, for thirty years on, Bourgeois also began making sculptures from stuffed fabric. Tanning is an obvious choice to conclude such an exhibition. Bourgeois however, often denies any link with Surrealism: most frequently cited is this statement of 1993, 'People misunderstand my work. I am not a Surrealist: I am an Existentialist.'

She repeated this position in 1994/5:

> That is the existentialist background of the work. I mention this because some historians, journalists, poets or whatever have associated me with the surrealist group, and this is just an ordinary, garden variety mistake. I have nothing to do with the surrealists, who were only smart alecks. Of course I knew them...[144]

In conversations with Wye Bourgeois has acknowledged a debt to the Surrealists and also that this is particularly evident in her work of the 1940s. Surrealism, now characterised by its multiplicity, has had a tremendous impact on all art. Surrealism gave *la grande permission* for artists to think about subjects and subjectivity in a new way. As such, it is an ever-present concern, and an ever-present crowd-puller for galleries needing to attract large audiences. What is important is Bourgeois' strategy of ambivalence: whilst she denies any connections she and her gallery repeatedly agree to release work for display in exhibitions connected with Surrealism. There must be, at the very least, economic reasons for Bourgeois and her gallery allowing her to remain associated with the discourse of Surrealism by permitting her work to circulate in these exhibitions.

I hope I have illustrated that Bourgeois' practice was formed out of a crisis of expression emerging from her post-cubist training. In New York, exposed to the same remarkable elements that forged the practices of numerous other artists Bourgeois reformed her practice into a symbolic, expressive language that takes from the current discourses of that time, modernist abstraction, Surrealism, Psychoanalysis through Freud and Jung and Existentialism. Like her contemporaries, this heady mix made for an idiosyncratic, highly individualistic phraseology that is deeply individual, and insists upon its isolation and individualism but shares its premises and processes, with those other artists of her milieu: the New York School. Where Bourgeois differed from her peers was in her position as wife and mother. Success, fashion, motherhood and the fickle nature of history left Bourgeois having to climb the economic ladder long after her early colleagues. I hope to show in my next chapter that Bourgeois, looking for a current mode, developed new forms to engage with the discourse of the 1960s generation and so speak and make solid her very conscious, not unconscious, states of self.

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[144] Lawrence Rinder and Louise Bourgeois, *Drawings and Observations* (Berkeley California: University of California, Berkeley and Bulfinch Press, 1995) p. 48. Based on four interviews of 1994-5.

2 Shop talk: Developing Strategies of Practice and Mythmaking

> Every time I am asked to talk about my work I desiccate. The only way in which I can manage it is to go into my studio and walk back and forth and around a piece. Then the relations between the work and me snap alive again. At this point the how it was made is obviously of no importance or relevance. I made it as best I could, considering that the object became what it is, and this becoming was not completely under the control of conscious desire of premeditation. The fluctuation of possibilities can be minute, slow, rough, sudden, re-examinable or definite. Anyway you slice it, there is always a battle to the finish between the artist and his material: sometimes with visible result, more often with experience gained but no result.
>
> Shop talk belongs to the artist, not the art lover. Immediate concern with the materials of sculpture is an avoidance of the true issue – like admiring the frame on a painting. But for the artist shop talk continues the close involvement that, finally allows him to shape substance to his own ends, to purposes that go beyond materials.
>
> The ebb and flow of my work is in the pouring, then the cutting. Poured plaster is a material of the twentieth century, made possible by the ever-present packaging and the flexible container – paper, cardboard or rubber – that can be bent, stripped off and thrown away. Once poured, the plaster can be cut and filed, and so reduced, or it can be made to grow and multiply and to be transformed before it is cast – as it has been here. But this is shop talk, a necessary obsession for the artist, an escape for the spectator.
>
> If I am asked what I want to express then this makes more sense. At that point there is a mystery we can at least talk about, since for a lifetime I have wanted to say the same thing. Inner consistency is the test of the artist. Repeated disappointment in its expression is what keeps him jumping.
>
> What then of this particular work of sculpture? It has the permanence of bronze, although it was conceived in plaster. It hangs, it is simple in outline but elusive and ambivalent in its references. Hanging from a single point at eye level it can both swing and turn, but slowly, because its center of gravity is low. It is symmetrical, like the human body, and it has the scale of those various parts of the body to which it may, perhaps, refer: a double facial mask, two breasts, two knees. Its hung position indicates passivity, but its low slung mass expresses resistance and duration. It is perhaps a self-portrait – one of many.[1]

This is Bourgeois' artist's statement for the small publication *Art Now: New York*. A publication that selected and profiled Bourgeois as one of seven artists in the city alongside the likes of Caro, Christo and Gottlieb. The sculpture discussed in the final paragraph is *Janus Fleuri* (plate 25), the most well known of a number of hanging *Janus* sculptures Bourgeois has made (indeed some were cast as editions).

Chapter one was structured historically, in order to articulate the 'Complete Shutdown' of Bourgeois' practice out of which emerged her first sculptural strategies in relation to modernism and surrealism filtered through the New York milieu. This chapter is, instead, centred on this statement, returning to it, drawing it out to dwell upon aspects of Bourgeois' practice in the 1960s that led her to the point where she could make this statement. This chapter will trace the

strategies of studio practice that took Bourgeois to this point: to the moment of writing this, a billiard shot in the 'positional game' of art as Baxandall outlines it and suggest the strategies (that I shall call mythmaking) that she took forward.[2] Such a tracing will, I hope, follow this statement, follow its pacing around the work, follow its desiccation, and position it historically at a moment of transition in Bourgeois' practice. A moment that, simply put, marks the silence that circles the work emerging into speech.

What status then is this statement as object of study? I largely avoid using Bourgeois' quotations from her interviews to advocate my observations and claims after noting their overly free use in other texts to provide evidence for ill-considered interpretations, repetitive arguments, overstatement and oversimplification. For instance, in 2002 Scott Wall-Lyon positions his own poetic thoughts between selected italicised quotes from Bourgeois (ignoring the span of years between the excerpts).[3] Wall-Lyon creates a single texture: merging the two types of writing into a single narrative in which we become positioned as the audience for Bourgeois' direct thoughts and in which we have the narrator's access to her inner life. In such texts the complexity of Bourgeois' strategic decision making in saying 'x' is ignored and the relationship between her verbal interventions and her sculptural notation is assumed to be clear and simple. Bourgeois' words are primary source material that informs and explains the object of study. I believe rather that the relationship between Bourgeois' use of language and her sculptural lexicon is dense and complex. Bourgeois herself was clearly aware of this complexity when in 1954 she wrote in an earlier statement:

> An artist's words are always to be taken cautiously. The finished work is often a stranger to and very much at odds with what the artist felt or wished to express when he began. At best the artist does what he can, rather than what he wants to do. After the battle is over and the damage faced up to, the result may be surprisingly dull – but sometimes it is surprisingly interesting. The mountain bought forth a mouse, but the bee will create a miracle of beauty and order. Asked to enlighten us in their creative process, both would be embarrassed and probably uninterested. The artist who discusses the so-called meaning of his work is usually describing a literary side issue. The core of his original impulse is to be found, if at all, in the work itself.[4]

In this excerpt, Bourgeois highlights a profound gap between the intention of the maker and the result of the making, construing the artwork as the rubble, shrapnel and carnage of the battle; remains which may, or may not, have the wonder of the perfect honeycomb. It seems strange to imagine Bourgeois, who has been so actively engaged in dialogue with the press and the art world in recent years, to be like the embarrassed and uninterested artist she proposes. This embarrassed artist's words, Bourgeois suggests, lack the genuineness of the work itself: the so-called meaning is usually a side issue and a disguise, and further, the work is both *a wonder and a stranger* to its maker. This points to a real problem of translation, one that is repeated in Goldwater's introduction to *Artists on Art – from the XIV to the XX Century*:

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[1] Louise Bourgeois' artist's statement *Art Now: New York* (vol. 1, September 1969) reprinted in Louise Bourgeois, *Destruction of the Father Reconstruction of the Father - Writings and Interviews 1923-1997* (London: Violette Editions, 1998) pp. 90-91.
[2] Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985).
[3] Scott Wall-Lyon, 'Louise Bourgeois In search of a State of Reason' in *Louise Bourgeois* (Köln: Kunsthaus Bregenz, 2002) pp. 9-18.
[4] Bourgeois, 'An Artist's Words' in *Design Quarterly* (no. 30, 1954) p. 18, in Bourgeois (1998) pp. 66-7.

> The contemporary artist, asked to write about his art, hesitates. The tradition of verbal shyness handed down to him by his craft has been reinforced by his own experience, and he will tell you that "explanations" rarely explain. His work, the best part of him, is there to speak for itself; those who do not understand its language will profit little from an approximate translation into the foreign tongue of words – even were this really possible. And besides the artist does not willingly enter into what, for him, must be a passionate discussion before a hostile, or at best objective, audience.[5]

Goldwater credited Bourgeois for providing 'the point of view of the contemporary artist'[6] in this volume of historical – not contemporary – artists' writings. The view of the contemporary artist, Louise Bourgeois' view, appears only in this introduction. Not only does this excerpt emphasize the paucity of a notion of linguistic 'explanation' but it also points to the situation, the social space of the statement, press release or interview, that Bourgeois' embarrassment in 1954 also highlighted. The artist's words must negotiate a possibly hostile, and always awkward, social space. Not only is an artist's statement an opportunity for strategic self-positioning amongst ones colleagues and to ones audience but it is also a moment of vulnerability within a social situation. There is a presumption that 'translation' into words is not really possible and a hint that perhaps the artist will say anything to get out of the door; all good reasons to treat Bourgeois' statements with caution. Both her 1954 statement and the 1945 introductory statement are rich in their evocation of the complexity of making and of the difficult relationship between studio practice and language: the paralysing fear of being asked to speak; the alien object and its distance from language; the explanatory mode.

Both of Bourgeois' direct statements (1954 and 1969), though reprinted in her recent collection of writings, have largely fallen out of use and are not quoted from or mentioned in critical texts. In the years between them Bourgeois has retained the sense of ones self-consciousness in beginning speech and of conceiving of making as a battleground in which the struggle may come to nothing. My concern is with the later text, which seems to retain its historical moment perhaps because it is so little used. Bourgeois' *Art Now* statement is a particular intervention. Bourgeois is aware this publication selects her as one of seven artists to watch alongside Gottlieb and Caro and as such it is a closely considered piece of writing that treads very carefully in what it does and does not say. It negotiates the situation of its being made public: an opportunity to place oneself and position oneself in the contemporary scene through ones ideas, and perhaps refusals, and something of this sense of a situation seems evident in Bourgeois' awareness of her own voice: 'Every time I am asked to talk about my work I desiccate'.

As a strategic self positioning it is a carefully written piece, using vocabulary unusual in the Bourgeois lexicon, such as: becoming, premeditation, the fluctuation of possibilities, elusive and ambivalent[7] alongside characteristic keywords and phrases such as mystery and expression. It

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[5] Robert Goldwater, introduction to Robert Goldwater and Marco Treves (Eds.), *Artists on Art - from the XIV to the XX Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1945) p. 7.
[6] Ibid., p. 1.
[7] Archive evidence shows two handwritings on some of Bourgeois' letters. One, the writer, is a hand that resembles her classic signature, a second hand alters and corrects (possibly Robert, who paid close attention to his wife's business). Such an observation may account for the change in vocabulary and sentence structure in this piece. This observation does not undermine the authorship of this statement for

is clearly different in style and tone from Bourgeois' interviews lacking her characteristic Gallic intonation, her brief sentences and phrases, her definitive, sometimes overstated positions. In short, this statement has but a faint echo of the imperative gesture and voice of something like this:

> Exorcism is healthy. Cauterization, to burn in order to heal. It's like pruning the trees. That's my art. I'm good at it[8]

This is an instance of precisely the kind of characteristic aphorism so well liked by critics and writers. Bourgeois' *Art Now* statement is dissimilar to her writings that are clearly art works, such as *He Disappeared into Complete Silence* (1947), or *The Puritan* (1947); texts that are essentially short narratives with a parable, or perhaps fable-like quality:

> Once a man was waving to his friend from the elevator. He was laughing so much that he stuck his head out and the ceiling cut it off.[9]

All Bourgeois' words in *He Disappeared into Complete Silence* are fables of this type and in this context they seem precisely to illustrate the 'so-called meaning' and 'literary side issue' that Bourgeois notes, pointing away from the image they accompany. The strategy in operation is not in the explanatory mode but, instead, plays self-contained fabulous narratives against self-contained architectural and abstract prints to open out meaning: to create figural and semantic possibilities.

Perhaps the strategy Bourgeois uses in *He Disappeared into Complete Silence* can help us to reckon with (cf. Preziosi) Bourgeois' statement of 1969. It is possible to take Bourgeois at her word, it seems that almost everyone does. If one takes Bourgeois at her word in 1954, (to treat the artist's words cautiously and be aware of the gulf between both the artist and the product of labour and between the artist's words and the meaning that the object itself suggests) then the relationship between word and image in *He Disappeared into Complete Silence* (where the text is a visual element whose semantic content is equalised with the semantic content of the aligned visual motif and a play of possible or refused meanings remains open, creating tensions between specific references and signs of abstraction) transforms our understanding of Bourgeois' use of language. Bourgeois can be seen to use language as *material*, as another kind of texture and substance that contributes to the sculptural dialogue within a piece. If this strategy of language as material, can be transposed on to the most well known instances, the interviews, the aphorisms, then Bourgeois' suggestion of 'so-called' meaning becomes very pointed. What is the status of 'Art is a guarantee of sanity' on the sculpture *Precious Liquids*[10] (1992) or perhaps of the well-known aphorism, 'Pain is the ransom of formalism'?[11] We might

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active and close editing is common when writing at any level. This is undoubtedly Bourgeois' text, and she approved of its inclusion in *Art Now: New York*. Further, there are noticeable differences between those texts Bourgeois composed in English and those translated from the French, such as the letters to Colette Richarme quoted in chapter one (translated by Caroline Beamish and David Brett). We do not know whether this piece was originally written in French and translated informally.

[8] Louise Bourgeois, quoted in Meyer-Thoss, *Louise Bourgeois* (Zürich: Ammann Verlag, 1992) p. 194.

[9] Louise Bourgeois, text accompanying plate five from *He Disappeared into Complete Silence* (1947) reprinted variously.

[10] *Precious Liquids* (1992) was made for Documenta in Kassel.

[11] Embroidered onto a postal sack in *Cell 1* (1991).

also consider those examples of word based art work, such as the print *Whitney Murders* (1977) made by hammering printing block letters into a printing plate, where language and sculptural force come together. If these examples and the key, pithy statements in the 1969 statement such as 'Inner consistency is the test of the artist', can be compared to her use of language as material in *He Disappeared into Complete Silence*, then the phrases become objects within the sculpture: elements of the art work and they lose their capacity to explain, to title. Bourgeois' words become another sculptural material, carrying with them their inherent character, just as stone, wood and plaster do. Bourgeois' use of words can itself be seen as a sculptural strategy. Then we come full circle, for if 'an artist's words are always to be taken cautiously', then these words too must be treated with caution.

I would then like the status of this text, Bourgeois' 1969 statement in *Art Now, New York* to remain in this circle of possibility: to have the potential to be sculpture and be a thingness whose texture and materiality is its poeticism: to possibly be fabulous and fictitious yet, at the same time, be a considered use of language put forth to a particular audience through *Art Now* in order to represent Bourgeois' practice, such that this statement embodies the sculptural practice rather than explains Bourgeois the artist. For my purposes then, this statement is very much an 'object' of study.

Desiccate

> Every time I am asked to talk about my work I desiccate. The only way in which I can manage it is to go into my studio and walk back and forth and around a piece. Then the relations between the work and me snap alive again.

This beginning could almost *be* sculpture: for dried, set liquidity characterises the work Bourgeois made in the 1960s, the work that concerns me here. One thinks of the porous, chalky, plaster lairs, and the cured rubber of *Fillette* (1968) and of *Double Negative* (1963, plate 26). Bourgeois' positing of desiccation to answer the journalist's or editor's request also points to a kind of speechlessness, a gap that can only be filled by walking: circling the sculptures, pacing them. The medical term anarthria, describes the inability to articulate in speech. It comes from the Greek arthron, for joint and so is literally 'without joint', without connections (anarthria is to be distinguished from aphasia, in which the faculty of language is lost). For Bourgeois connections are regained, joints made, relations 'snap alive', (like knuckles cracking perhaps) in the presence of her sculptures, in peripatesis. Yet, despite this return to the sculptures, circling them, Bourgeois' statement largely refuses to talk about her work. Instead, Bourgeois circles her practice: dismissing the process of its making as 'shop talk' but then discussing the process of making. She implies that she would prefer to talk about what she wants to express (her subject) and then does not say what it is, only that she must keep saying it: 'for a life-time I have wanted to say the same thing'. Bourgeois finishes by considering a particular sculpture but again, instead of offering a clear explanatory statement, she is elusive 'it is perhaps a self-portrait', an enigmatic indication which offsets the more detailed considerations of formal qualities of weight, balance and symmetry: 'its hung position indicates passivity, but its low slung mass expresses resistance and duration'. In this final paragraph, Bourgeois again creates the plays of meaning and possibility we have discussed in relation to her use of words

as material in sculpture. In this statement, in a fashion that is dependent upon the physical and peripatetic encounter with the object and upon the self-knowledge of ones own body, Bourgeois is writing sculpture, not writing about her sculpture.

The circles that Bourgeois draws in the structure of this statement and her indication that, 'if I am asked what I want to express then this makes more sense. At that point there is a mystery we can at least talk about', together imply a secret at the centre of her work, one she always circles around. Jo Applin suggests that a number of sculptors in the 1960s employed secretiveness as a strategy in their practice, pointing to a central mystery.[12] Perhaps that is all this is: a strategy, both in the positioning of the statement and the refusal of closure in Bourgeois' discussion of *Janus Fleuri*. Perhaps all there is, at the centre of the, feet-drawn or word-made circle, is the object. What if, the intimation that this is 'all there is', 'just' the object, or 'merely' the object, is mistaken. It is my assertion here that the significance of this strategy in 1969 of implying a mysterious expression is in its relationship to the sheer difficulty Bourgeois has in articulating her objects of this period: in the anarthria that begins this statement; a statement where even the paragraphs seem disjointed. To suggest that there is a mystery is a canny strategy, one Bourgeois has not abandoned but instead has exploited in more recent years. But it is also, more importantly, a move that serves to elide the gap that even Bourgeois finds difficult to bridge with this work, a gap that Bourgeois tries to pace away, to circle, and to find words for. The mystery, in other words, obscures what is profoundly difficult to speak about Bourgeois' plaster and latex works of the 1960s.

If it seems reductive to attempt to group together a heterogeneous visual practice, well it may be. But my concern here is with a materiality of sculpture so intense that it needs to be seen and to be circled and to be paced, it is a materiality that, I contend, still makes this work hard to speak about and so lets us, for the moment, consider Bourgeois' works together through their material connections: through *being* plaster and latex. If it also seems a little strange to consider what I assert to be intensely physical sculpture through 'secondary texts', it is because my concern is precisely with the shift into writing: it is with the desiccation of the voice, the anarthria, the dis-jointedness that dominates Bourgeois' 1969 statement. That there is something here to be reckoned with is clear from other texts. Both Nixon and Fer have identified this body of work as crucial and hence Bourgeois' work of the 1960s seems to be becoming positioned as a critical foundation or hypostasis for a larger theorizing of Bourgeois' practice. Both Nixon's and Fer's analyses have in common a need for a direct contact with the sculptures themselves. For Nixon this is staged as an access to the drives. For Fer it is a going beyond representation itself. She writes of the 'more-than-likeness, the lack of representation,'[13] the sculptures journey 'further down the road of literalness itself into a realm of excessive, bodily materiality.'[14] Though I concur with the centrality that this body of work is coming to have, I find that the tendency of Fer and Nixon's work to concentrate upon the psychic obscures the historical function, the historical moment, which this paper hopes to

[12] Jo Applin, *The Encrypted Object: The Secret World of Sixties Sculpture*, (PhD thesis: University College London, 2003) unpublished.
[13] Briony Fer, 'Objects Beyond Objecthood' in *Oxford Art Journal* (vol. 22, no 2, November 1999) p. 29.

explore. I would like to consider instead this body of work in terms of a strategic engagement in the studio. Clement Greenberg famously said to Caro: 'If you want to change your art, change your habits', I want to focus on What Bourgeois' studio habits were.

The most often cited reference in the discourse on Bourgeois' work in the 1960s is Lucy Lippard's essay *Eccentric Abstraction*[15] written after her exhibition of the same name[16] in 1966. Fer argues that Lippard's hyphenated language indicates the visceral presence of Bourgeois' work within the conception of Eccentric Abstraction as practice where 'evocative qualities of specific organic associations are kept at a subliminal level'[17] and where 'sensual aspects are, perversely, made unpleasant'. Fer's feminist, Lacanian analysis shows how Bourgeois' work undermines our subjectivity, placing us at the border between destructive desire and jouissance: between desire and the drive. Fer argues that Bourgeois disintegrates the subject by showing that looking is a form of destruction as much as it is a form of pleasure and so the presence of the object becomes the sense of losing a portion of oneself. Whilst Fer highlights the difficulty of talking about these works she relies upon Lippard's hyphenated words, her own engagement with the objects is limited to a consideration of the differences between Hesse's and Bourgeois' use of latex, beyond which, the 'excessive bodily presence' of Bourgeois' work is subsumed in Fer's more indistinct term 'bodily empathies'.

Lucy Lippard did not shy away from Bourgeois' work. Although she retreated quickly from the concept of Eccentric Abstraction and soon had regrets about the exhibition, there is no indication that Lippard regretted her choice of Bourgeois as the elder artist, the predecessor who forged the historical link between the new work and the antecedents Lippard claims in Surrealism and 19th Century monuments. The hyphenation Fer notes is clear in descriptions of Bourgeois' *Lairs* such as this:

> Often labially slit, or turned so that the smooth, yellow-pink-brown lining of the mold as well as the highly tactile outer shell is visible, her mounds, eruptions, concave-convex reliefs and knot-like accretions are internally directed.[18]

To my mind it is not a lack of representation, a going beyond representation, as Fer suggests that causes Lippard's particular language, her own circling of the objects' 'surrounded intimacy' but that the sculptures, in this case the lairs of the early 1960s, present real problems of legibility. Plate 27 is an installation view of Eccentric Abstraction. The near invisibility of Bourgeois' work, at the back and on the left, seems not only to reflect how other artist's success in the exhibition overshadowed hers, but seems also to reflect how inaccessible this moment of

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[14] Ibid., p. 25.
[15] Lucy Lippard, 'Eccentric Abstraction' *Art International* (1966) reproduced widely, for instance, see, Lippard's collection *Changing*, or Armstrong and Marshall's *The New Sculpture 1965-75: Between Geometry and Gesture* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1990) pp. 54-58.
[16] Eccentric Abstraction was curated by Lucy Lippard at the Fischbach Gallery (November 1966). This exhibition has come to stand as short hand for a number of positions against minimalism, particularly since *Ten*, a landmark exhibition of minimal art, showed concurrently at the Dwan Gallery in the same building. The artists in *Eccentric Abstraction* were, Alice Adams, Louise Bourgeois, Eva Hesse, Gary Kuehn, Bruce Nauman, Don Potts, Keith Sonnier and Frank Lincoln Viner.
[17] Lucy Lippard in Armstrong and Marshall (1990) p. 58.
[18] Ibid., p. 55.

emerge is to us historically. We cannot see the vivid fresh latex that struck Lippard and Robbins below. What is obscured in this image has remained inaccessible.

If Lippard's struggle with language represents a material challenge to description and to representation rather than a psychoanalytic one then let us consider the narratives that might unfold from this perspective. Lippard's language circles and tries to reach a group of difficult objects whose language – of tactile lumpenness, viscerality, thingness – is at the same time a language of subtle allusions to flesh and to landscape and to a kind of fungal or plant-like germination, for instance, *Fold* (1964, plate 28). The impression of anarthria Bourgeois' statement presents is reflected in Lippard's struggle to describe the objects to her readers. Lippard's most interesting moment is, 'they imply the location rather than the act of metamorphosis' though this is also her most ambiguous: 'location' suggesting both the look of a cocoon and the moment of transformation. We are again left with the impression of a struggle in the writing, circling about the sculptures and their references. Lippard is clear that these works bring about an intense and immediate reaction, 'they provoke that part of the brain which, activated by the eye, experiences the strongest physical sensations'; a locating of experience that is itself ambiguous, at once embodied but possibly also psychic. Lippard can be seen in some sense to mediate between the present emphasis upon the psychic and an earlier focus upon bodily engagement that we shall see below in Robbins' writing.

The *Lairs* Lippard is attempting to write were first included in Bourgeois' exhibition at the Stable Gallery[19] in 1964, Bourgeois' first solo show for eleven years and an exhibition that has become overshadowed by *Eccentric Abstraction*. Bourgeois exhibited, *Rondeau for L* (1963), *Labyrinthine Tower* (1962), *Lair no. 1*, *Lair* (1962-3, plate 29),[20] *Fée Couturière* (trans. *Fairy Dressmaker*, 1963, plates 30 and 31), *Still Life* (1960-62), *Clutching* (1962), *Portrait* (1963, plate 32), *Double Negative* (1963) and *Forêt* (also called *Night Garden*, 1953). Bourgeois also exhibited several sculptures in latex but it has been difficult to identify these precisely, beyond *Portrait* and *Double Negative*.[21] Bourgeois' Stable reviews were mixed: one dismissive – 'the show is melancholy as if the sculptor hadn't felt like working'[22] another condescending but loyal – 'Miss Bourgeois has always been an original sculptor one of the few working in the round, and one is glad to see her position reaffirmed.'[23] A feature in *Art International* by Daniel Robbins on the other hand, engaged closely and personally with the Stable show. It is quite different in tone and intensity from Lippard and Fer, and from its contemporary writings. Robbins' focus is the subject in writing meeting the object sculpture, he begins:

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[19] Stable Gallery was run by Eleanor Ward, Bourgeois exhibited January 7-30, 1964. The exhibition was installed by Arthur Drexler, who was also key in arranging Bourgeois' first exhibition at Peridot Gallery (1949). Stable Gallery was located in the area of 57th Street placing it at the centre of a number of galleries exhibiting avant-garde work: Betty Parsons, Sidney Janis, Kootz, the Green Gallery, and André Emmerich.

[20] The recurrent pattern of changing the titles of this work as we shall see later makes is difficult to clarify which, or how many, of the six sculptures which have at one time been called *Lair* were exhibited.

[21] The latex works may have included *Inner Ear* and *Passage*, objects for which I can find no documentation. *Inner Ear* is listed in *Louise Bourgeois, Memory and Architecture*. *Passage* is mentioned in a review in *Arts Magazine*, March 1964. The sculpture now known as *Lair* and used for the publicity posters for this exhibition has the title *Grande Pierre* in *Art News* (Jan, 1964).

[22] V.R. 'Reviews: Louise Bourgeois' *Arts Magazine*, (March 1964) p. 63.

> When the January 1964 exhibition at the Stable Gallery opened, brilliantly installed by Arthur Drexler, it was as disturbing to those who recalled the artist's earlier work as it was to those unacquainted with her past. Radically transformed, the techniques and forms seemed to reverse outward manifestations. It was as if an old acquaintance once darkly lean, elegant and aloof, had come back from a long journey transformed: fleshy, chalky, round and organic. These new sculptures seemed to have the capacity to quiver and ooze. No longer would one immediately associate them with figures; no longer did their scale seem analogous to our own. They did not share our space nor did they strive to relate to one another within their new independent space. The effect of this exhibition was not ingratiating for the work was powerful but rather repellent. It exerted much the same fascination as an aching injury, demanding an effort from us, drawing our concentration.[24]

The 'old acquaintance' was, of course, present in the exhibition as *Forêt* (also called *Night Garden*, 1953) a single wooden personage that offset the new work. Robbins' writing is rich, evoking the familiarity of 'old acquaintance' and yet making clear the disturbing and repellent nature of the experience. He describes a bodily engagement with the sculptures, an intense confrontation between sculpture and audience, which Robbins makes analogous to a grand force such as magnetism or gravity, a force that demands, draws and exerts pressure. It is familiar but absolutely alien: no longer a figure like us yet 'they' are alive in some way, quivering, oozing. It is certainly a paragraph that draws one in, makes one want to see and feel this for oneself and recreates the atmosphere of the exhibition.

Robbin's references for the allusions of the *Lairs* are less connected to the fleshy body than nature:

> It has become evocative of a world of forests, of hills, oceans, caves, hollow echoes of the sound of waves. The viewer puts his eye against a small opening and vast perceptions and possibilities are realized. If one could contemplate the perfection of the earth as a geological creation from somewhere high above the globe, seeing and sensing the internal structure that holds the crust to the core – the layers of rock that mesh firmly below its surface, the deep scooped depression filled with water – then one would know and understand these sculptures... this supreme logic of nature provides the pattern for Louise Bourgeois' sculpture.[25]

Hills, oceans, caves, and the sound of waves: this is, of course, the territory of the sublime: the sculptures as little moments of the infinite, glimpses of Kant's 'boundlessness.'[26] Robbins' eulogy is that this work is of world importance in that this work is the world made miniature, the scale key to each sculpture functioning as another world within this one. As we approach the sculpture we cross a threshold between perceiving it as a thing in the gallery and perceiving instead an environment in which we can be an oscillation that can be read as disturbing the stability of subjectivity.[27] Robbins suggests the fascination of hearing the sea in a shell and the hidden quality of the interiors of Bourgeois' *Lairs* are both key facets to apprehending their structure – his analogy is with the spring foliage that somehow, in a gentle breeze, reveals

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[23] N.E. 'Reviews and Previews: Louise Bourgeois' *Art News* (January 1964) p. 10.
[24] Daniel Robbins, 'The Sculpture of Louise Bourgeois', *Art International* (vol. 8, 20 October, 1964) p. 29.
[25] ibid. p. 30.
[26] The famous quotation is: 'the Beautiful in nature is connected with the form of the object, which consists in having boundaries, the Sublime is to be found in a formless object, so far as in it, or by occasion of it boundlessness is represented', Emmanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement* (1790).

something of the arboreal structure hidden beneath. Robbins writes, 'as objects, these pieces have a total existence with resonances as imaginative as the dolmens in the Petit Clamart that Bourgeois climbed on when she was a child. As concrete shapes with no visible start or finish, they are taken out of time.' His writing is a free run of the imagination; collapsing a landscape of the mind upon the allusions of a panoramic terrain in the sculptures whilst making a clear evidential link to Bourgeois' biography (one that could also, for instance, have included her visit to the caves at Lascaux). It is a long way from Fer's positioning of this work beyond representation. Robbins circling is a writing going outwards: the mysterious centre almost visible through Bourgeois' peeping holes is the world beyond the gallery a world of seasons and epochs, and the sublime. One could say that what is at stake here is whether Bourgeois' objects, as texts, present us with the contiguity, difficulty and lacuna of metonymy, as Fer's position would seem to indicate, or the likeness and similarity of metaphor. Robbins' writings on Bourgeois' Lairs certainly seems in keeping with Jakobson's metaphorical function which, 'suggests a yet higher stage in the totalizing process, a moment of consummate or hypostatic union when the very difference between inward and outward realms would at last fall away, and imagination reign supreme through the gift of metaphorical insight.'[28] Alternatively one might say that this question is one of interpretation, whether this is work is best considered through the poetic and metaphorical, or through the psychoanalytic perspective. Bourgeois' way to talk about this work is to return to the studio.

Shop talk

> Shop talk belongs to the artist, not the art lover. Immediate concern with the materials of sculpture is an avoidance of the true issue – like admiring the frame on a painting. But for the artist shop talk continues the close involvement that, finally allows him to shape substance to his own ends, to purposes that go beyond materials.

Bourgeois is insistent upon the place of 'shop talk', her catch-all term for any discussion of the making processes and studio activity. She differentiates clearly between the position of the artist and that of the audience; shop talk is put forth as an avoiding tactic, 'an escape for the spectator', but it is her way to reconnect to her work, her 'necessary obsession'. She contradicts her insistence on shop talk's irrelevance for her audience by including a passage of 'shop talk' in her 1969 statement:

> The ebb and flow of my work is in the pouring, then the cutting. Poured plaster is a material of the twentieth century, made possible by the everpresent packaging and the flexible container – paper, cardboard or rubber – that can be bent, stripped off and thrown away. Once poured, the plaster can be cut and filed, and so reduced, or it can be made to grow and multiply and to be transformed before it is cast – as it has been here.

This contrary move may be a part of a secretive strategy: devaluing the clues that she gives her readers to press forward the idea of the mystery. It is certainly a curious claim: for the contemporaneity of an ancient material. It is, in fact, Bourgeois' process of pouring and casting that is modern: her use of the disposable, flexible mould, a mould made by re-appropriating

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[27] Cf. Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000) pp. 149-51.

[28] Roman Jakobson quoted in Fred Orton, *Figuring Jasper Johns* (London: Reaktion Books, 1994) p. 11.

packaging materials, yoghurt pots and so forth. Modernism moved plaster out of its role as an intermediary material, a material of maquettes and mould making and it became for the first time the material of the finished object. Bourgeois' techniques make a second shift by leaving the territory of the division between carving and modelling behind. Her shapes and forms are found through lifting off, and casting directly from, things in the real world. After this, Bourgeois may 'cut' (carve and subtract) or 'grow' (model by addition) but the core of her shape is a cast, a found form copied. In this respect Bourgeois' work is closer to that of George Segal, whose carapaces of plaster were cast from life, but whose surfaces show that the plaster soaked gauze to has been modelled to shape details with a pictorial richness that goes beyond the capacity of scrim to describe the form beneath. See, for instance, Segal's *Bus Riders*, 1962, Hirschhorn Museum, the details of eyelids and the delicate smoothness of the face areas belie the apparent crudity of his method and his loose rendering of the lower portions of the figures. It is a specific treatment of the figure that recalls portraiture's partiality to a finer brush to render the face while letting broader strokes indicate the fabric of the torso.

This passage of shop talk is the place in the text that Bourgeois' work seems to inhabit: in which we can imagine *Janus Fleuri* most vividly. It is here that one can most clearly see the work being made, and connect the maker with the powerful substance that so engages Daniel Robbins. It is apparent that Robbins has visited Bourgeois' studio and discussed with her the technical processes of her production methods. His text also relies on shop talk as he tries to come to terms with the intricacy and complexity of these inside/outside *Lair* sculptures, where an apparently soft, visceral interior can be peeped at through a hard outer shell:

> First, Miss Bourgeois angle-cuts a fine brass wire-mesh screening which is then shaped into one single element, a continuous unbroken line. (To her this recalls the thread that spun the ancient tapestries which, when a young girl living by the river Bièvre, she helped her parents to restore.) This wire, susceptible to the most intricate arrangement, becomes the core for poured fluid rubber which is sometimes patted and applied with a trowel or knife. At this stage in their growth from internal to external, the lairs of Louise Bourgeois are visceral. Like living flesh, the rubber quivers and flaps. It gets cut and spliced, forming channels, ridges, walls, tendons, bridges – all internal structure of this organic sculpture. The parts are flexible but they lock together into a complex whole, and at this stage are already complex realizations. Appallingly real because of the transparent pink-ochre color of the freshly poured rubber, they have a viscous sheen like the inside of a mouth.
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> This dermal matrix then forms the basis for a plaster or cement cast, and the transformation wrought by this step is fantastic! Parts that once yielded to the touch or seemed to breath in changing air currents become hard; but the pure chalk white that emerges always retains the imprint (physically as well as associationally) of its soft birth. Finally, this interior world is mysteriously joined to a poured plaster shell, a smooth crust or skin which rolls gently, swelling or contracting as it manifests the interior life of the form. The intricate interior is now concealed except for small holes or larger crevices.[29]

[29] Robbins, p. 30. Bourgeois' technique was not unique, and can be compared with, for instance, Rueben Nakian's method of 1948 as described by Wayne Andersen: 'he started draping sheets of glue stiffened burlap over chicken wire supported on a welded pipe armature, then covering the whole with quick-setting plaster.' Andersen, *American Sculpture in Process: 1930-1970* (Boston Massachusetts: New York Graphic Society.1975) p. 121. Peter Agostini's use of plaster is also a precedent for Bourgeois' work: Agostini modelled plaster as it set inside plastic bags, or poured thin layers into moulds made from crumpled sheets of aluminium and then modelled the exposed surface.

This is a comprehensive tracing of Bourgeois' process, but one where he too struggles to elucidate what he has seen, becoming clumsy and pedestrian at times. Phrases like 'sometimes patted and applied with a trowel or knife' contrast to his earlier flowing erudition. It can be seen that some of Lippard's hyphenation may not result from a lack of representation but from tangible problems. What colour is 'yellow-pink-brown'? Robbins describes it as pink-ochre.

Robbins tries to take us through a series of processes from mesh sheeting armature to final construction, from flexible material of moulding to hard material for casting. In this work the latex (supported by a metal armature) acts solely as a method to achieve a certain kind of curve, plasticity and surface, which is finalised in plaster. Robbins senses the same connotations of flesh that Lippard identified in works such s *Le Regard* (plate 33) and *Portrait*: dermal, womb-like, quivering and flapping like living flesh, appallingly real with a viscous sheen. It is here in the article when one is in the studio rather than in the gallery that one feels the repelling draw Robbins posits, here as he reiterates bodily references and especially those of soft, slippery insides: the womb, the mouth. As we know, the sheen of latex does not last long, nor does its incredible and indescribable colour, *Portrait* and *Double Negative* now are quite different objects, more dead and dried flesh than alive. Unfortunately plaster is a fragile material and most of what survives from this period is extant as casts, *Lair* (1962-3) is a totally different object from the one exhibited in 1964. Its present installation shows again a reciprocal relationship with photography. It was *Lair* that was used as the publicity image for the exhibition. The now well known photograph of it resting upon coiled wire with drips of plaster covering the crate upon which it was made was blown up on a poster. In the Stable Gallery it was shown on a neat, grey, low plinth, making a clean refined abstract shape (plate 34). Now at DIA Beacon, it falls between these two aesthetics, resting again upon coiled wire – a gentle support it no longer needs being now a cast in robust bronze – the wire is clean, a new version of the studio original and the base is made from two blocks of unseasoned wood laid side by side. An attempt has been made here to recreate the drama of the highly successful photograph rather than quietness of Bourgeois' original display. Unable to recreate the dirt and distress of the studio object, *Lair* now seems a fake. It has lost much of it's surface detail in the casting process and as a bronze it is a heavy, dead thing, it's paint cracking or simply worn away to reveal the dark metal beneath. If this seems to be a common complaint about casting and conservation then perhaps Caro's thoughts on plaster, may help to elucidate the particularity of the material we can now only imagine from the photographs:

> Back in the 1960s I found certain materials, like plaster and plastics, very difficult and unpleasant to cope with simply because they do not have enough physical reality. It is not clear enough where the skin of them – not the skin, the surface of them resides. They are flat-white in that kind of unreal way that you can't tell exactly where they are; the appearance of them gives no indication of their mass or weight. I needed to use a material that you could identify that it was there.[30]

[30] Anthony Caro, 'A Discussion with Peter Fuller' (1979) in Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz (Eds.), *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists Writings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) p. 103.

Although he corrects himself, Caro's first impulse is to react to plaster as skin, a physical engagement with its 'unpleasantness' that seems to connect his statement precisely to the argument of this chapter. Caro observes the utter lack of sheen, polish or reflectivity that creates the strange surface quality of plaster. His uncertainty reflects and draws out the displacement of perception and destabilizing oscillation that is precisely what Robbins describes in Bourgeois' *Lairs* in 1964 as he approached their interior vistas. That Caro hated plaster is, of course, well known; his antipathy may have resulted from his time with Moore. Bourgeois stopped using plaster as a final material for altogether different reasons. Ever pragmatic, she took the advice of her gallerist at Stable who knew that the fragility of plaster presented a problem, its fragility put off potential buyers.[31] If Bourgeois is using a method of direct casting and pouring plaster in this work, whilst latex is an intermediary material, then after her Stable exhibition we see Bourgeois experimenting with new materials for the final object whilst continuing the same methods: shape and form are made through casting and pouring and surface is closely affected by the chemical set of a material that can then be modelled or carved as a secondary process. In 1967 Bourgeois notches up her concern with permanence casting into bronze and beginning to learn about stone work. Marble becomes a practical choice but also Bourgeois quickly becomes interested in the qualities and specificities of certain stones and in turn they are eminently saleable as evidenced by the lush photographs in *Louise Bourgeois Works in Marble* produced by two commercial galleries.[32]

(Back) Into the Studio

> Anyway you slice it, there is always a battle to the finish between the artist and his material: sometimes with visible result, more often with experience gained but no result. (1969)
>
> At best the artist does what he can, rather than what he wants to do. After the battle is over and the damage faced up to, the result may be surprisingly dull – but sometimes it is surprisingly interesting. (1954)

Bourgeois' characterisation of her sculptures as the debris of a struggle in the studio between artist and material is an analogy of heroic proportions that has fallen out of the dominant discourse on her work (perhaps because this is a tremendously masculine characterisation, one can imagine Picasso, or Pollock or Giacometti struggling, sweating it out in the studio, but Bourgeois here is claiming a masculine position, one that does not have the safety of, say, Hesse's delicate use of papier maché). The dominant discourse positions Bourgeois' sculpture as the visible and tangible resolution to – and therefore evidence of – her emotional tensions

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[31] Louise Bourgeois interviewed by Colette Roberts for the Archives of American Art 1968:

> LB: You see I have a long experience with galleries – the Stable gallery – very especially when I gave her a fantastic show of – everything was made of plaster, it was my medium. And she said: "It's not saleable. I can't do anything with plaster." Well, you know, lots of people have done plaster and nobody chose to object. But I listened to her. I realized that when things made of plaster are pushed around for 20 years there is a good chance they will get chipped. I have things here—
>
> CR: A pretty good chance.
>
> LB: Yes. There was something in what she said. And marble will take a lot of pushing around.

[32] Michael Unterdörfer, *Louise Bourgeois Works in Marble* (New York: Galerie Hauser and Wirth, Zurich in association with Cheim and Read, 2002).

and anxieties. Such a position is clear, for instance, in Marie-Laure Bernadac's monograph, *Louise Bourgeois.*[33] Bernadac writes that in the 1940s when Bourgeois found herself alone at home after breakfast, she would cut up milk cartons, fold them, and hang them together. The form was basic, a prism that she later painted black, and the figures either stood alone or in clusters. Bernadac quotes Bourgeois, 'Sculpture was revealed to me as a means of expression thanks to a milk carton, thanks to the simple triangular shape of something useful and indispensable. Which meant that something could be expressed.'[34] For Bernadac, this anecdote is the moment of '*revelation*' (sic) for Bourgeois: she began making sculpture in order to gain emotional control over her life – sculptural exorcism. Perhaps there is something in the anecdote, not in the much repeated epiphanic resolution of emotional chaos into geometry, but as evidencing a practice that draws in non sculptural materials – found objects, waste things – and uses them, makes something of them rather than leaving them to be, just waste. Such a practice is one which is intuitive in that the form, outcome, or result is a discovery, found through cutting, folding and so forth, but one that works blind, one that is precisely not setting out to express 'x' (if we believe that art intends to do this at all) but which may or may not end there. The artist then, does what she can with what she has: milk carton or plaster.

Beginning with these two notions, of struggle and of doing what one can, I want to reconsider Bourgeois' studio practice beyond the bounds of Bernadac's psychobiographical frame. To circle the objects, to trace their making and possibly trace the moment of becoming of this gap, that makes the work so difficult to articulate in writing. If we do not achieve this at least we will have done what we can with the materials we have.

Nixon considers Bourgeois' studio practices in terms of sculptural solutions that perform psychically. Nixon suggests Bourgeois' techniques: inside-out construction, multiplication, splitting and conflation, articulate Klein's construction of aggression, loss and fantasied repair and recovery.

> [Bourgeois' techniques] subvert the phallic logic of gender and disarticulate the Oedipal body; techniques of pouring, cutting, scratching and fragmentation that enact the ferocity of the drives or alternatively of stitching, wrapping and polishing that effects repair of damage inflicted through aggression.[35]

I discussed the relationship between this use of Bourgeois' techniques and her statements in the introduction. Here, I would like to point out that the cost of the approach that I intend to take is that it does not account for the narrative of violence that is inherent to Nixon's interpretation. I do not address Bourgeois' narratives of anger, violence and destructiveness in this thesis. Such terms are commonplace in writing about Bourgeois, from both psychobiographic and psychoanalytical perspectives. The narrative of violence is, I believe, a very complex positioning, possibly even her most interesting, risking as it does the complete collapse of her artistic strategies into a narrative of hysteria and it is in this regard that some of the most interesting theoretical work has been done, see especially Nixon. Violence is a part of Bourgeois' public persona as evidenced in the 1993 *Arena* film. There are no holds barred

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[33] Marie-Laure Bernadac, *Louise Bourgeois* (Paris: Flammarion, 1996).
[34] Bourgeois in ibid., p. 50.

here, as Bourgeois, throws objects and even breaks a plaster of one of her works to show Director Nigel Finch the level of her anger.[36] Violence is also deeply implicated within the psychobiographical and psychoanalytical approaches, but this thesis is concerned with Bourgeois' strategies, and whilst clearly an interpersonal strategy in the Arena film, destructive violence is not something available to studio practice. Destruction and making are so completely opposed that it must be excluded from the studio, or there would be no oeuvre. To consider Bourgeois' *work* we must be able to consider it within a narrative of making not of destroying.

Bourgeois' first forays into three dimensions in the 1940s were remarkably successful; she managed to exhibit and sell her very first sculptures. Once Bourgeois moved away from the tall personages interest in her work evaporated, although as we have seen in the previous chapter, the circumstances were complex. At the end of the 1950s, although Bourgeois continued to participate in a number of group exhibitions no extant sculpture, print or drawing has, thus far, been identified from these six years and we know Bourgeois diversified at this time, establishing her own bookshop. Perhaps Bourgeois showed old works when the annual exhibitions came around[37] or perhaps she has excised from her catalogue anything that she produced between 1954 and 1959.

In 1960 Bourgeois returned to the studio and began to make new work in a new material, plaster. Bourgeois is able to frame herself differently. She is 49, her children are grown up, the possibility of maternity is behind her and the art scene has moved on. In 1960 her return to the studio represents a turning point. Bourgeois abandons commerce for teaching (adults and children at Great Neck, Long Island and in New York public schools) and returns to sculptural practice. It is a particularly isolated, knuckling down to learn, independent kind of practice: a slow, mixing powder and water, scraping and chipping kind of practice.

The first extant pieces we have records of are *Spiral / Summer* and *Life Flower 1* both from 1960 (plates 35 and 36). Both are sculptures that Bourgeois could make and move alone, needing no workshop, specialist equipment or skills that could not be mastered through isolated dedication. In *Life Flower 1*, loops of plaster are fixed to a narrow base and so rise up to make three dimensional hollow petal shapes. The plaster is clearly built up in thin layers of wet, fresh mix and then allowed to set. The petal loops are neither tubular nor rectangular in section; instead it appears rather that edges have arisen by auspicious accumulations of plaster along the way, as if, as one moves around such a structure, the palette knife and setting plaster restrict ones access to certain areas and this dictates its curvature or edginess. Looking at *Life Flower 1*, it is all to easy to imagine the new roll of armature wire, springing outwards as Bourgeois unpacked it. Hoops that could simply be pinned down to a wooden block and then

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[35] Nixon, 'Bad Enough Mother' *October* 71 (winter 1995) p. 91.

[36] Ann Marie Somers *Ode À Ma Mère* (PhD: New York, 2001) cites another film where Bourgeois smashes crockery on screen: Robert Hughes, *American Visions* (Virginia and London: PBS and BBC, 1997). Somers also notes an anecdote in the film *Chère Louise: portrait of the sculptor Louise Bourgeois* by Brigitte Cornand (Paris: 1995) of Mme Joséphine Bourgeois habitually keeping crockery by her at dinner which she would dramatically smash if Louis Bourgeois became angry at the table.

plastered up into these wayward circles. Bourgeois is grappling with the most basic materials and methods of making things in these sculptures. *Spiral / Summer* is a related but smaller piece. Initially it seems like a writhing snake: the upper end rises into a head-like globule of plaster, the rest might be the knot of its body. It isn't; there is no more than an allusion to the snake in the gesture of the top end, which curves back upon itself as if inspecting its own flank. The 'spiral' of the title is also only notional, the long curve of plaster over armature wire bends clumsily to and fro around another separate loop which forms a central support. The marks of making are everywhere evident; each one seems to be a testament to a struggle with plaster itself. There are long curving planes on the far left where Bourgeois' palette knife has stroked creamy wet plaster, making a new thin layer upon the one beneath. There are scrape marks at the apex of the spiral where she has pulled with her knife at the setting substance trying to make it yield before it sets too hard. There are places where gooey fingers have left creamy dots and lumps and, at the forefront, Bourgeois has pasted the plaster when it is cheesy, starting to go off, when it can be added with impasto thickness but remains structurally weak.

How, these sculptures ask, does one make a thing as fluid as I am, a thing that is hard, and will stay and will be sculpture, but from this stuff that starts out like milk and before your tea has cooled has set solid in the mixing bowl. These sculptures are testament to the materiality of plaster, to its combination of feyness and predictability, to the things one can only learn about a material by trying to work with it. When I look at it I can almost feel the crumbs, cast off in the making, crunching under my feet and I want to scratch the dryness of flour white hands. They make vivid not only the intricacies of the material but also the kind of explorations that contemporary sculpture students make in the studios around me. The art school discoveries, that serve to lead somewhere else, somewhere more interesting. When Bourgeois had her next solo exhibition in 1964 she did not show these two works. Their titles are unreservedly positive and life affirming; they recall her 1940s paintings which frequently took their subjects from natural world. (*Still Life* [1960-62] is also relevant here) consequently they lack the aspect of the potentially threatening, violent or disturbing that is a feature of her 'signature' work, such as the *Spider* series. I am suggesting that there is in these works the basic entanglement with sculpture school processes (perhaps it is pertinent that these sculptures just preceded Bourgeois' return to college to study French art history in 1961) and that continue her interest in the organic forms of the natural world.[38] These are tentative pieces, speaking primarily of their vulnerability, of their inability and of their isolation. More than anything these sculptures speak of struggle: with the medium, the sign of whose fleeting liquidity is central to the forming of the sculptural surface, with form and shape, and with the subjects – which remain tentative in both depiction and name.

As a graduate sculpture student, a tutor said to me of a piece of my work, something of the kind: 'keep this object and keep it in your mind, whatever happens from now on you know that this thing is all your own.' When Bourgeois wrote of battle, I believe she could have been talking

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[37] American Abstracts Artists, Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors and 1953-7, The Whitney Annual.

[38] Bourgeois (1998) p. 68.

very literally, of a real struggle to make something and more than this, as these tentative sculptures illustrate, to make something of her own. It is precisely this language of making something of ones own that Bourgeois uses in her interview with John Jones in 1966. "Then I discovered – in 1944 –I discovered that these groups, these families of figures had never been done before and this is – again and again – it has happened three or four times – I discovered I was saying something that was my own." I believe this need is fundamental to Bourgeois' understanding of what it is to be an artist, it is a profoundly modernist individuality, based in the example set by Picasso and the notion of adding to a history of forms and taking ones place in this history.

Bourgeois' notion of survival and the 'result' of the battle open out the monographic discourse: for if there is a result, then it is surely defined in Bourgeois' terms as that which goes beyond its materials, allowing us to see that sometimes a thing is only its materiality, it is only a lump of plaster. *Spiral / Summer* and *Life Flower 1* sit squarely in this realm of the possible and the achievable. Alongside Bourgeois' notion of survival and result, they allow the possibility that an artist might make a thing because they can, because that is all they could do, because they could not achieve something else.

Cast/offs

Returning for a moment to Bernadac's wonderful and vivid anecdote of Bourgeois making use of empty milk cartons, I wonder if it can't be more light-hearted, and at the same time, in regard to her studio practice, more serious than Bernadac's interpretation. Light-heartedly, the feel of the activity is familiar; adults and children alike flatten the foil off chocolate coins and curve it around fingers, or make little objects at the table. It is an habitual activity that allows for a particular kind of thinking, as when doodling on a telephone pad, or while listening to a speaker. Bourgeois' milk cartons point also though to the habitual pattern of reuse (my mother has a pile of wine corks in her kitchen, waiting for a *use* to come along). This is not only supposed post-war frugality but a conservatory activity, running from the domestic storing of things ones children might use (loo rolls and cereal packets) to the genuinely economic salvage of which all artists are expert in one way or another (keep the kind of yoghurt pot or jam jar that is good for mixing). It is further an activity that aligns with the possibility that one might make some thing because one can.

Bourgeois' very recent work has relied heavily on the reuse of items found in, or stored in, her Brooklyn studio and items Bourgeois says she has kept for many years, such as fragments of tapestry and kitchen knives. As long ago as 1954, Bourgeois made *Untitled* (plate 37) a pole work made of used wine corks and we have seen Bourgeois relying on pouring and casting into disposable containers described in her statement. *Untitled* 1950, connects the kitchen table to the studio through habit and form rather than through psychobiography or psychoanalysis. I am foregrounding the evidence of Bourgeois' habitual pattern in the formation of her work because mundane habits are partly what 'having a practice' as an artist means. This is an historical tracing of the work that is separate from psychobiographical constructions but perhaps as important because it allows for an alternative construction of subjectivity where Freud's

structuring of the unconscious need not hold sway, where the connection between the habitual behaviour of milk carton making, or doodling, and 'the unconscious' could be a connection to a Deleuzean unconscious as motor not as source, or, where such an apparent connection is only that: apparent. Rather the making is an instance of an existentialist re-inscription of the self in the present.

Untitled 1950 is not the only instance where one can posit the evolution of an habitual studio practice into a form that then, through the dominant discourse, has been interpreted psychobiographically. There is in Meyer-Thoss a fascinating studio shot of the late 1960s, with cylinders and cones of plaster stacked up into a characteristic melee (plate 38). What this photograph shows – that others do not – is the resemblance between the conical shapes and the leftover plaster that gathers at the bottom of a small mixing vessel (of a sort that sculptors working in plaster use all the time); the kind of left over plaster that is waste and goes into the rubble sack when tidying up at the end of the day; the kind of plaster shapes achieved through the simple casting Bourgeois' 1969 statement describes:

> Poured plaster is a material of the twentieth century, made possible by the ever present packaging and the flexible container – paper, cardboard or rubber – that can be bent, stripped off and thrown away.

Poured plaster is a modern material *only* because of the flexible containers and their offering of the repetitive found-object cast. At about the same time Bourgeois was spearing old wine corks (circa 1950-4) she also made at least two sculptures that stacked cast plaster pieces (plate 39 far left only partially visible and centre front small stack, and plate 40 left hand stack). Occasionally these are lumpen spheres but more often they are the same, almost hemispherical, space-inside-a-bowl shape. Hidden in a history that concludes this period as making painted wooden sculptures, the surfaces of these pole works, either heavily pitted with air bubbles or mottled with the imprint of fingers into clay, are not the kind of surfaces Bourgeois was achieving in her carving. It may be that these pieces bridge the missing years 1954-59, and the transition from wood to plaster for they are described as *Figures 1950s-1960s, wood and plaster* in Wye's 1982 catalogue. They are described as being in a 'Private Collection', but given the fragility of plaster I doubt they remain extant (its own weight could fracture and chip the lower pieces very quickly). Here is a sculptural practice that occupies a very different space: where one pours and waits, where form is not something one models, sands or chisels, but depends on the found objects of the mould. Here is a sculptural practice that suggests that the cutting and carving and casting of these pole works are about repetition, methodical movement and a kind of blankness felt in habitual motion. It is a long way from the stereotypical perception of the sculptor releasing the form from within the stone, or occupied in the intense, intricate judgements, stepping back and forth, to model dabs of clay. It is a long way from a profound welling up of the drives or an insight of the unconscious as a visionary moment. Bourgeois pouring, waiting, drilling and finally stacking to make these sculptures (or indeed slicing planks into simple rhomboids and then painting them a single flat colour) is about a particular kind of activity, and the mental satisfactions of the repetitive task and its tangible, quantifiable result. This activity may coincide with Fer's effacement of the subject but not through the blankness

she identifies in Hesse's work (read through Caillois), nor the beyond representation of Bourgeois but rather through the absence of mesmeric, repetitive motion in making.

Bourgeois' studio photograph from the late 1960s shows a layered pile made from cylinders, hemispheres, blocks and pointed domes: all the kinds of simple shape that can be made by casting into household containers. The cast as form, it is clear, persists beyond Bourgeois' unproductive years (1954-9) and into the 1960s. This photograph looks forward to the highly successful sculptures made from repetitions of simple shapes such as *No. 72 (The No March)* (1972, plate 41) and *Partial Recall* (1979). *No 72*, it is useful to remember, was made using the left over cores from machine drilling stone. Marble cores that are waste – cast-offs – only to be ground down, but cores that for Bourgeois are useful. It is now possible to see a number of Bourgeois' 1960s objects at the DIA Center in Beacon New York and the reappearance of these objects makes it plain that Bourgeois' bulbous forms such as, *Soft Landscape I* (1967, plate 42), *Soft Landscape II* (1967, plates 43 and 44) and *Unconscious Landscape*, the shapes and forms that culminated in the marble *Cumul* works, are pieces that bear a close relationship to the blank, repetitious, and conservatory making I have been describing. These works are all made by pouring a kind of plastic (now badly aged) over an armature of upturned pyramids, hemispheres and cones. Perhaps Bourgeois, when she was testing these new pourable materials simply dripped plastic over an aggregation of cast bits such as those in the studio photograph and those speared onto the pole a decade earlier. Perhaps Bourgeois was making use of casts as testers for her new materials, cast-offs that regularly accumulated, casts she had been trying to make *work* for some time. The casts in *Soft Landscapes* (*I* and *II*), are now the armature, raised to different heights upon small cast cylinder bases, in *Soft Landscape 1* one of these armature shapes is not conical but a small pyramid: as if from a milk carton. Shop talk for the audience is not an irrelevance: it reveals a whole other history of these objects, one where accident and experiment with new materials and handy – or waste – casts, leads to the peculiarly effective and beautiful bulbous form that became a key motif in Bourgeois' vocabulary. This created a highly successful and allusive form; one that she had carved (a version of *Soft Landscape 2* is carved in alabaster), that she had cast (*Unconscious Landscape* was cast into bronze 1967) and that she varied, making many versions over many years.

This is not the kind of intentionality in making that one sees in Bourgeois' descriptions of her later work such as *She Fox* (1985) which she has described as exorcizing her ambivalent feelings towards and from her mother. Instead it is precisely the kind of silent, material struggle that is the core of sculptural practice where the engagement with the material leads to a new visual vocabulary, to an eloquence – or silence – of form, shape and surface; the kind of struggle Bourgeois was attempting to write. Bourgeois' writing in 1969 can then be seen as precisely the same kind of engagement with language and verbal imagery, a pacing about, a circling in words, a pressing and testing the substance of words, that she is grappling with in her material engagement in the studio.

It can further be seen that there is now a whole group of sculptures and studio objects over a long period of time that arises from a particular studio practice: combining techniques of making through repetitive shaping and pouring with an habitual collecting and accumulation, in a

conservatory activity. This method is partly a kind of household salvage, partly a fascination with the simplicity and perfection of the simple cast coming together in habitual repetition as practice. Such a material connection, a shop talk connection, links Bourgeois' 1950s stacked pole works, which have largely fallen out of the discourse, to her keynote bulbous form in the *Cumul* works, to *Double Negative*, to the rubber glove cast of *Hand* (1970), to the geometric serial pieces such as *No. 72 (The No March)*, and Bourgeois' lesser known wooden structures of the 1970s such as the frankly bizarre *Fences are Obsolete* (1977)[39] (plate 45). This sculptural strategy, of salvage, repetition, and selection can also be perceived as being reinvigorated in the 1980s in the *Cells*, where large room-like spaces act as containers for shelves of bulbous glass vials, wood and glass spheres, household objects, fragments of tapestry, loaded nostalgic souvenirs and so forth. We can see the almost hemispherical casts as recently as a studio photograph from 1989 (plate 46). It is then a studio practice – a sculptural strategy that has enabled the production of decades of Bourgeois' most important works and that lies outside the foreclosure of intentionality which remains one of the problems with Bourgeois' personal and psychic narrative fables. This is a sculptural strategy that the concentration upon psychobiography and psychoanalysis in the wider discourse on Bourgeois has prevented being seen and yet it seems to be central to how these works came to be, how they can go beyond material and become results, hard won things.

In this light, Goldwater's inclusion of Bourgeois in the section 'Assemblage' in his guide *What is Modern Sculpture?*, becomes more obvious and his text foregrounds the sorting and grouping activity of 'Quarantania', in which a number of carved pole figures are gathered close together upon a simple base. More recent writing, such as Bernadac's monograph which summarises – and indeed reduces – Bourgeois' work of the 1960s into the notion 'Organic Refuge' as the aesthetic of the lair, would lead one to think Goldwater might have included his wife's work in 'The Portrait', or 'Biomorphism'. He did not do so, having to categorize her work he chose 'Assemblage'. My addressing Bourgeois' casting, salvage and sorting is a tactic to actively write against the kind of all-engulfing, reductiveness of Bernadac's text and its ilk. This is not to say that Bernadac's tracing of this *Lair* form and it's evocation of the trap and the refuge is mistaken, but to illustrate that this type of psychobiographical narrative is not a sufficient approach to this body of sculptures.

The Myth of the Studio

In my introduction I developed an idea of myth as a practice of imaging and imagining concepts that shapes the way we think and is not tied to classicism, the cosmic or the inevitably false. Midgley recognises how we live our lives through numerous, often problematic, mythical structures. She writes, as I have mentioned:

> We are accustomed to think of myths as the opposite of science. But in fact they are a central part of it: the part that decides its significance in our lives. So we very much need to understand them.

[39] Made from salvaged fencing taken down by her neighbour that Bourgeois strapped together in groups.

> Myths are not lies. Nor are they detached stories. They are imaginative patterns, networks of powerful symbols that suggest particular ways of interpreting the world. They shape its meaning... Such symbolism is an integral part of our thought structure. It does crucial work on all topics not just in a few supposedly marginal areas such as religion and emotion, where symbols are known to be at home, but throughout out our thinking.[40]

Having narrated Bourgeois' studio strategies, I would like to consider how the studio itself functions strategically and mythically for Bourgeois. For Bourgeois' studio has come to signify both herself as a creative persona and the perceived enigma of her practice.

Photographs of Bourgeois' studio are an important motif of the monograph texts. Occasionally images sit in between the type: document of sculpture and image of studio. For example, in the version of the photograph of *Spiral / Summer*, the background shows a number of clay maquettes stored on a high shelf. These are tentative, experimental things, captured through a lack of professionalism in Bourgeois' photographic technique, and they evidence her studio practice in a way that more recent studio photographs do not. These lost objects were perhaps sketches – maquettes – and possibly not intended to be finished objects: debris from the battle, or not yet results. On some, the clay is pressed on in the rounded lumps of classic 'Lanteri' technique; one is reminiscent of the nest box *Maison* (1961) and on the far right there is a *Willendorf Venus* like form, similar to both *Figure* (1960) and *Untitled* (1968-9, plate 47).

This type of prehistoric and kinaesthetic figure recurs in Bourgeois' practice but seems to appear more often in studio photographs than in her exhibition history. For example, in the photograph that made the end plate to Deborah Wye's 1982 catalogue (plate 48), we see a carefully compiled group of Bourgeois' objects. Just off centre is placed a small *Femme Maison* style object, built up in clay or plasticine around a waving Barbie doll, and in the corner, partially cropped, one can glimpse a *Willendorf Venus* type figure. The 'Maison–Barbie', so to speak, and the 'primitive' kinaesthetic figure are also in other studio photographs such as the image from 1989 that illustrates Christiane-Meyer Thoss' 1992 monograph which also shows *Untitled* 1968-9. 'Maison-Barbie' is identified in *Louise Bourgeois: Memory and Architecture*, as *Femme-Maison* (1982)[41] beyond this one catalolgue, where *Femme-Maison* (1982) is photographed against a plain background, this small and fragile object does not seem to exist outside the film and photographic renderings of Bourgeois' studio. It is a clumsy and tentatively expedient solution which seems to have value in its ability to make solid in studio photographs the important but two dimensional *Femme Maison* motif and to introduce an idea of the sketch and part-drawn into photographs which collect together complete works rather than record the working space and process. Further, the headless kinaesthetic *Willendorf Venus* figures, of which there are several versions, are rarely exhibited. Constructed in this way, as a compilation of key works and images, the 1980s studio photographs function less as a capturing of the practice, the 'work in progress' or even the artist at work, than to make clear the range of the sculptures available to the market.

If *Femme-Maison* (1982) is functioning to insert a signature two-dimensional work into the image, then the studio photograph becomes akin to the pictorial rendering of the salon as

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[40] Mary Midgley, *Myths We Live By* (London: Routledge, 2003) pp. 1-2.

encompassing the entire collection, a kind of composite rendering of the brand "Bourgeois". Such photographs owe little to the documentary rendering of a working space. We might usefully contrast this image with that taken of Caro and his assistant Jon Isherwood in 1989 (plate 49) showing two men attending to something in a studio filled with useful equipment and materials. Just visible are some small maquettes and at the right hand edge are the curving steel plates of a full side work. Barring occasional 1970s images of Jerry Gorovoy, Bourgeois' assistants remain invisible, so do her materials: the screws, nails, glues, and so forth that we see in the Caro image. Bourgeois' studio is presented as a place in which art inhabits and is created, not a place in which art is made.

As the endplate to the first major catalogue of Bourgeois' work and her first national retrospective, the Wye composition functions very specifically to evoke the inaccessible privacy of the studio, as a romantic space, for the gallery visitors and catalogue buyers where the same works are present. Robbins reviewed Bourgeois' MoMA retrospective and noted that the installation of the sculptures made it difficult to study the sculptures individually; instead squeezing the sculptures into non-chronological islands and clusters of ideas (see installation view plates 50 and 51). Further, the catalogue departed from the traditional format of chronological listing and data about each piece. He observes:

> This Bourgeois catalogue presented a sequence of plates that was chronological on the whole but departed from chronology to illustrate indoor or outdoor groupings. It did not provide traditional catalogue entries, or even a checklist. Thus, both the exhibition and its catalogue seemed to be designed principally to demonstrate how rich and dense is the total effect of Bourgeois's work, rather than to offer the tools necessary for an understanding of that work.[42]

By using this image as endplate, Wye implicitly proposes a set of spatial relationships between the sculptures in the catalogue that the linearity of page order has not permitted: you have seen the sculptures individually, look at them in their habitat. I contend that this pattern, established by MoMA and Wye, has become an entrenched pattern in the curation and dissemination of Bourgeois' work, a constructed strategy of foregrounding mood and experience through a trompe-l'œil mimicry of an idea of the studio perceived as a more authentic experience.[43] This strategy places the mood and the nostalgia of the photographic image of the studio over other, more traditional, curatorial and art historical concerns.

Robbins also notes MoMA's decision to display more than sixty drawings tacked onto one wall as an effort 'to recreate a mood of teeming intensity,'[44] there is a photographic precedent for this in a photograph of Bourgeois' studio from the 1950s (plate 52) where the studio wall is itself recorded as a wall of drawings, possibly including some of the same ones exhibited at MoMA. The curatorial pattern of MoMA in 1982 pattern is not restricted to this one time and place, for

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[41] Unterdörfer, p. 53.
[42] Daniel Robbins, 'Louise Bourgeois at the Museum of Modern Art', *Art Journal* (winter 1983) pp. 400-2, quote p. 400.
[43] The ethos of the 1982 MoMA catalogue contrasts with Deborah Wye's *The Prints of Louise Bourgeois*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1994). Twelve years later, Wye has opted for a meticulously researched, detailed, chronological exposition of Bourgeois' print history, but still annotates the prints with Bourgeois' statements where possible.
[44] Ibid. p. 400.

instance, the recent curation of *Lair* in DIA Beacon represents a retrieval and tidying up of the original photograph rather than new curatorial direction or a reference to its first exhibition.[45]

The need to make present Bourgeois' studio is also a trope of the writings of the monographs, for instance Paul Gardner writes:

> When Louise Bourgeois steps into her studio, she passes, like Alice, a little grave child with golden tresses, through a looking glass that lands her in an enchanted and hallucinatory world. But it is a world of Louise's own making.[46]

Gardner delineates a hallucinatory space and if we take this quote alongside the recollection of Arthur Drexler in the same volume then it is a space *too* powerful for the rest of us, enchanting but somehow dangerous:

> "I stepped into her studio" he [Drexler] recalls, "and it was like finding myself in a strange movie by Jean Cocteau. There stood this very small, intense woman – extremely svelte, handsome – wielding a huge cleaver with which she worked on balsa wood. She was alarming as she attacked the wood with a kind of innocent magic that was obsessive, yet also poetic. I was crazy about her work, but I didn't stay long. I remember thinking that when I entered her studio it was like passing into another world."[47]

Keisler's 'another world' is remembered about a small, domestic studio where Bourgeois as wife and mother transforms into a tool wielding sculptor. Paul Gardner brings forward in time and transforms this metaphor into the specificity of Alice in Wonderland appling it to another space: Bourgeois' industrially scaled, garment factory studio. Christiane Meyer-Thoss begins her monograph by writing about Bourgeois' ex-factory studio. Meyer-Thoss is fascinated by the studio lighting, each bulb can be switched on and off independently heightening its mood of labyrinthine landscape:

> I found Bourgeois' studio to be a labyrinthine garden, an organic yet orchestrated wilderness riddled with escape routes. Every morning at the same time, Bourgeois enters her space, her forgotten sky, and makes the rounds rearranging as she goes the stacks and assemblages of ribbons, wooden blocks, metal tubing. As time passes, she wears paths through the studio like those that animals make to flee through underbrush. After a while, these escape routes, as changeable as the light, show where Bourgeois is going. She is only interested in fresh trails.
>
> The density of Bourgeois's sculptures in her studio has an overpowering impact. They are of daring finality; their serenity is imperious.[48]

Meyer-Thoss's text collapses working space into art work: bourgeois becoming her own *She Fox*, her studio, her lair. It is a construction that has important ramifications implying that the work itself and not only its curation and representation may be caught within this circle of evocation: what if the *Cells* series are less psychic mapping than presentations of the synecdoche of the studio as mystical making and mythic space? Even within her own terms as a transformative description from workspace into animalistic habitat, Bourgeois' activity of sorting and rearrangement as procedure and process has found its way.

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[45] Further, the reconstruction of *The Destruction of the Father* at DIA, while being apparently similar to the well known photograph of it, is missing the 'male portrait head [that] rolls in a dark corner', described by Lucy Lippard in 'From the Center'. See Peter Weiermair (Ed), *Louise Bourgeois* (Zurich and Frankfurt am Main: Editions Stemmle, 1995) p. 15.

[46] Paul Gardner, *Louise Bourgeois* (London: Universe, 1994) p. 9.

[47] Arthur Drexler, in ibid., pp. 27-8.

I have no doubt that Bourgeois' studio is a profoundly affecting and entrancing space, my husband's studio is a similarly affecting space. The art gallery though is another kind of didactic space and the decision by MoMA to replace pedagogic chronology and examination, traditional in the retrospective form that Robbins notes, with theatricality and mood, and to attempt to make present an inaccessible reality proposed by the photograph, is mythmaking at its grandest level.[49] Bourgeois' 'timelessness' becomes visible not as inherent to a practice that is fundamentally a-historical, out-of-time and able to speak across generations (and therefore within the bounds of the classically constructed genius) but rather as a product of a discourse activated by and functioning alongside curatorial procedures using a-historicism for its own ends. Further, a-historicism and a-chronology can be seen to be tied to spatial relationships, and to the romance of the studio as creative space: a space maintained by the erasure of the realities of factoring and constructing sculpture. The desire for timelessness can be seen again in the recurrence of motifs that seems to undermine, for instance, the categories of early, middle, late periods. *Femme Maison* made a comeback as sculpture in the 1980s in very saleable carrara marble. This form, quite different from the original print, emerged during Bourgeois' return to Italy in 1981. With Jerry Gorovoy as her companion and assistant she rediscovered plasters left behind more than twenty years earlier and a number of her stone works of the 1980s are variations on her original 1960s versions, eliding twenty years of practice and change.

MoMA's retrospective set a precedent for a thematic, non-chronological and studio evoking pattern of display of Bourgeois' work, but even the lighting that so affected Meyer-Thoss's impression of Bourgeois' studio has been recreated in the exhibition space. For instance, the Serpentine Gallery blacked out its central dome and used ceiling level spot lights to display *Spider* (1997) replicating the deep shadows cast by Bourgeois' garment factory lights.

To return to the photograph of *Spiral / Summer*, the undersized backdrop reveals a simple storage shelf, where the yield of a formal exploration of surface and shape has been put aside, where the results are shelved. The studio photograph, as used in the mythic construction of Bourgeois, obliterates the reality of the studio – the dust, the tests, the maquettes, the failures from the struggle and the tools of the trade – replacing all this with simple and simplistic summaries of her practice. Such photographs, and the curatorial activities that attempt to make real that image in the gallery, blur the constantly problematic distinction between art and life in Bourgeois' practice. If Bourgeois can be seen as operating tactics of mystery and secrecy – leading her audience to investigate and unravel rather than engage in 'aesthetic contemplation' as William Rubin wanted to do in 1969 – then the photograph presents at the end of our search for the secret centre, only the photograph. Clarity is presented as a lure and a myth of Bourgeois' work springing fully formed from her tortured soul is made tangible in spaces of display and documenting texts.

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[48] Meyer-Thoss (1992) p. 49.

[49] We might compare this, for instance, to the type of curatorial activity that led to the division into four grand themes at the Tate Modern but this discussion, though fascinating, is beyond the scope of this paper.

We can see Bourgeois' *Cells*, which contain sculpted and ready-made objects in pared, dark and severe spaces as working in the same way. In these pieces, Bourgeois plays the formal against the symbolic and evocative using all the materials she has to hand, from the operations of language to the perfection of the sphere, to create symphonic and emotional confrontations for the viewer. For instance, *The Red Rooms* (1994) contains glass and marble objects alongside hanging breast forms, skeins of wool, dark wooden door panels, dark furniture, old objects and a red plastic bed cover with a single penile protrusion. This sculpture compares to the synecdoche of the studio publicity photograph in that it contains so many references to signature works (including skeins, sumptuous fluid organic marbles, long weighted forms) as well as an intense evocation of childhood memories from the nostalgic styling of doors and found objects and the title and attendant narrative. Both studio publicity photographs and these sculptures (all from the 1980s) are loaded, resonant accumulations and this leads to a strange double layering for the audience, this is art by Louise Bourgeois but it is also, somehow, the art of Louise Bourgeois.

Shop Talk Now

I would like to point briefly to a further operation of myth, the level of the language of Bourgeois' work and it's accompanying narratives. The anxious, troubled position of shop talk in the *Art Now* statement has been transformed in recent years. In the 1969 statement, it is a simple allusion to habitual patterns and process: 'the ebb and flow in my work is the pouring and then the cutting' – a positioning of process as a primary and structuring activity (as conservation, casting, discard and assemblage). This is an allusion that could also be read as a canny contemporary gesture in 1969, given the new art practices that would come to be known as process art. We see in recent years that Bourgeois' shop talk has transformed, becoming a specific strategy employed in the discourse around the work. It no longer serves to reconnect the artist and the objects from which she feels so distanced and this problematic, of the translation of visual communication into linguistic communication, has effectively been erased from the dominant narrative. Instead Bourgeois' processes are framed as a simplistic psychological dictionary, where cutting, pouring and so forth have a significant psychic function. Lippard's *Louise Bourgeois from the Inside Out*,[50] clearly outlines the psychic and emotional meaning of Bourgeois' methods and this extends to the specific symbolism of certain colours. For instance Bernadac states that the blue and white in *Partial Recall* is peaceful and passive and, in 1992, Bourgeois associated white with renewal, blue with peacefulness and pink with feminine and self-acceptance.[51]

In this light, we might usefully question the narrative of 'resistance' in Bourgeois' interviews and gallery essays. See, for instance, Bourgeois' interview with Stuart Morgan, 1988, where she links the resistance of the stone to her own 'desperate fighting position.'[52] The resistance of stone is more a principle than a daily reality for Bourgeois' use of technicians and carvers is well known: see *On 'The Sail'* (1988), in *'Writings'* where she outlines the carver's role. This text

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[50] Lucy Lippard, 'Louise Bourgeois: From the Inside Out' *Artforum* (March 1975) pp. 26-33.
[51] Meyer-Thoss (1992).

also shows the persistent modernist sculptural desire to pierce through the block, a concern that is also little spoken of. Back in the 1960s, *Cumulus No. 2*, was first made of, the now familiar, plaster hemispheres encased or wrapped in coarse cloth, the original is photographed in Rubin's article in *Art International* (plate 53) and looks totally different to its more well known counterpart (plate 54). Importantly, another basic model also existed at this time, photographed during one of Bourgeois' Italian visits (plate 55). William Rubin noted that Bourgeois 'has had this work executed in white marble', he writes: 'The marble version, however, looks like the illusionist, i.e. trompe-l'œil version of the original idea.'[53] This is perhaps Rubin's most observant comment, for Bourgeois' turn to carving is an embrace of the illusionism and polish of hundreds of years of the carver's skill. The viscous liquidity of the plastic of *Soft Landscape* becomes a drapery-like copy of itself and in Blind Man's Buff (1984) one of Bourgeois' latex costumes has been copied and, literally, set in stone.

If Bourgeois does not carve this work herself, then is the narrative of resistance serving to obscure another set of questions in the work? Namely, questions of the language of her sculpture and her departure into illusionism? The persistence of the resistance of stone might be better thought of as a myth to update the kind of struggle Bourgeois articulated in her *Art Now* statement: 'Anyway, you slice it there is always a battle to the finish between the artist and his material'. If myth according to Barthes is a depoliticizing process then perhaps the narrative of the resistance is of stone is the naturalizing, the appropriation of the myth of her struggle in the studio to make a thing of her own, a thing that works. This is not to say, with Barthes, that it is necessarily false, but instead, with Midgley, to argue that a useful metaphorical structure of battle and struggle, where in the 1960s the results and debris seemed to indicate a very real studio exertion, has become less useful now and it has been transformed into an outlet of emotional aggression linked to certain materials. The problem with this construction is that it has led to the point where the image of an elderly Bourgeois wrestling with her increasingly large and finely worked marbles, is far from convincing.

Further, Bourgeois' biography is used to form an interpretive frame for her sculptures, but Bourgeois' titles are also implicated in an activity of mythic construction and reconstruction. Bourgeois has changed the titles of many of her works as her psyche-focused narratives have become more popular. *The Destruction of the Father* was originally called Le Repas (The Evening Meal) and its re-titling brings it into line with its attendant story, by summarizing it. More interestingly, *Lair* (1962-3) was originally titled *Grand Pierre*[54]; a change which moves the sculpture out of an era of Personages, when the surrounding narrative is one of homesickness and portraiture of those close to her, and creates the Lairs as a genre. The Lairs are the first conception of a direct sculpture of the psyche in Bourgeois' practice and evolve into the notion of the Cell as a kind of surreal and spatial, psychic mapping. It is because of the common

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[52] Stuart Morgan, 'Taking Cover' *Artscribe* (67, Jan/Feb 1988, 30-34) in Bourgeois (1998) p. 155.
[53] William Rubin, 'Some Reflections Prompted by the Recent Work of Louise Bourgeois', *Art International* (1969) p. 20, footnote. Note that whilst *Cumulus No 2* was presented as a sculpture which may have further versions, more recently a similar photograph but of *Cumul 1* is now presented as a 'model'. See plates 24, 25 and 26.
[54] See *Art News* (January 1964) p. 10.

pattern of re-titling of this period of work, in particular, that identifying exactly what was shown in Bourgeois' Stable exhibition and *Eccentric Abstraction* has been made difficult. I have noted 26 works –and there may be more – which have had their titles changed. F*illette* is a second or even third title, the fragility of the little girl in the title *Fillette* adds another layer of evocation to the sculpture once called Presence and perhaps also once titled Fated Portrait.[55] *Spoon Woman* of 1949-50 has been re-titled *Depression Woman.*[56] *Life Flower 1* has changed to *Spiral,*[57] even *Baroque* (1970), one of the sculptures Mieke Bal turns to in her call for 'preposterous history'[58] – a call for radical presentness – is also known as, Woman, Irate Creature and Hostile and Angry Woman. These personifying titles seem more puzzling for the rough-hewn knot of Baroque but they are not as easy to assimilate to a Deleuzean fold of thought as the more historically connoted *Baroque.*[59]

Emerging from the operation of changing a sculpture's title is a certain relationship to language and its function as I suggested at the start of this essay: that language might be a material component of practice. Simultaneously, re-titling also reflects a fluid relationship to the changing winds of the market, as titles slip between the psychic mapping (*The Destruction of the Father*), portraiture (Woman), descriptive (Spoon Woman looks spoony in a way that compares to Giacometti's concave Spoon Woman) and generic (such as the type, *Lair*, *Maison* or *Cumul*). Where the former is a function of making art, making resonances and poesis, the latter is a function of myth, making a mythic level of meaning for heterogeneous, difficult – or as Rosalind Krauss notes, morphologically ambivalent – works.

At the opening of this chapter, I questioned the apparent simplicity of the relationship between the 'explanatory' statement and artwork: pointing to Bourgeois' use of text as sculptural material in her work. The relationship I am describing between Bourgeois' narratives and myth should not be seen to supersede that analysis but be an aspect of it, such that there are occasions where the accompanying narrative and the title act as semantic materials which offset the formal, visual material to produce a play of possible meanings and tensions. There are other occasions where the narrative element acts to foreclose certain meanings by offering simple and easily digestible fables. In either case, what is least important and least available is a notion of truth-value, for as Bal notes, Bourgeois, statements: 'are neither true nor false. They

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[55] Rubin (1969, p. 20) describes the failure for him of *Fated Portrait*, because of its literal figuration and arresting image. Though not definitively *Fillette*, I can find no evidence for another sexually arresting sculpture of this title and to my mind *Fillette* is the only candidate.

[56] Louise Bourgeois interviewed by Michael Auping, in Bourgeois (1998) pp. 351-6.

[57] *Spiral* is used in the monograph, *Louise Bourgeois: The Secrets of the Cells* (Munich, London, New York: Prestel Verlag, 1998).

[58] Bal also relies upon *Homage to Bernini* an earlier, but equally abstracted, *Lair* form.

[59] Wye (1982) p. 26. This catalogue has numerous other examples of re-titling or plural titles, *Fée Couturière (Fairy Dressmaker)* has also been known as *Hanging Lair*, *Lair #2*, and *Lair no. III*. Many of these changes, or multiples titles, stem from this sixties period. By contrast, very little of Bourgeois' first body of work was re-titled, except for *Spoon Woman* (*Depression Woman*) which seems to have reverted to its earlier title and *Blind Leading the Blind* (one version is called *C.O.Y.O.T.E* – come off your old tired ethics) which could, at a push, be considered a series. It exists in three versions, made over many years, none of these versions are the original sculpture that was exhibited in Bourgeois' second Peridot Show and subsequently destroyed.

simply fall short of the work.'[60] In this analysis what matters is not the detail of Bourgeois' childhood but how those narratives work with and against the objects as sculptural material *to the present purpose*.

Shop talk has transformed into the symbolic mode and the studio practices themselves have been obscured. Bourgeois' clarity upon the symbolic nature of her work and its motifs has coincided with an embracing of a figurative and representational lexicon in her objects, needles, spiders, clearly rendered marble body parts. This lexicon does not replace but runs alongside the modernist abstraction of Bourgeois' early work. If myth is symbolism and conceptual structures of imagery that shape the matrix of thought, not merely superficial imagery to facilitate dissemination, then we can see Bourgeois' growing verbal confidence and expanding symbolic lexicon, as evidenced in the dominant account, as an active mythical strategy that was not present in 1969 but that she has since developed. A strategy that has been, by all accounts, highly successful. This highly symbolic, psychological account, easily digestible within our post Freudian society, is easy to quote and to publish. The connection of one biographical narrative to one piece has the simplicity of the classic, cosmic myths. It was Penelope's eating of the pomegranate seeds that caused the death of autumn and the return of spring, and represents folkloric explanation as common sense and experiential learning ('always wash your hands before you eat' would be lore from my own neck of the woods) and gains its truth-value through dissemination and consensus. Similarly we can see the literalism of Bourgeois' motifs, each reuse of the needle, for instance, as loading layers of significance upon each repetition. The needle loses its existence as form, it loses its miniature leaning, echo of the confrontational, or conversational, groups of pole figures Bourgeois made in the 1940s. Just as the aegis, has no certain shape or design but becomes almost pure narrativity – of impregnability, of Medusa's death, of the Trojan wars and so forth – so Bourgeois' symbolic motifs lose their substance, lose their weight as objects, as they become increasingly mythically loaded.

Beyond this, the overarching psychological framework operates as myth through its metaphorical structure and overarching, cosmic explanatory power. So just as Penelope's abduction and rescue is a part of the greater cosmic narrative of the Pantheon, so the psychic function of Bourgeois' work, to show her loneliness, fears and repressed anger, is a part of the greater narrative of the Freudian schema. Myth is not only a structure of supporting narratives but of the work itself: as *The Destruction of the Father* evidences in its proscenium staging of the scene of psychoanalysis, Bourgeois' work is now made in a public mythical language, of literalism, of spiders, of hands, of sexuality, of keep on the path and don't stray into the woods.

We might consider then the operations of Bourgeois' recent works, such as *Untitled 2000*, *Untitled 2000*, and *Untitled 2001* (plate 56). These sculptures are stacks upon stainless steel poles recalling Bourgeois' 1950s pole figures, but each is made of handstitched fabric. One uses the tapestry scraps that we understand as referencing her childhood the other two use the symbolic colours, one pink and one blue and white, speaking of *Blue Days and Pink Days*, her

[60] Mieke Bal, *Louise Bourgeois' Spider* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 2001) p. 73.

quote turned catalogue title. How much can these be convincingly read within the dominant discourse and how much are they acting to encapsulate that very discourse itself? Is the standard version of Bourgeois, the mythic Bourgeois, the subject of these works or is it possible to see these works as sculpture? Are questions of form and the like becoming redundant in works that are consuming their own history?

Coming Full Circle

As we have paced the work (no doubt in circles) a number of strands have emerged which I would like to summarise. I have posited Bourgeois as an artist engaged in a real struggle in her return to the studio, wanting to make something of her own, who develops strategies of practice in order to achieve this and develops strategies of mythmaking upon this. In the process the very language of struggle, visible in the early work, becomes subsumed into the mythmaking: becoming the motif of resistance. At the same time, the important idea of there being a gap between the artist and her work, that Bourgeois repeated for over twenty years, a gap that is near untranslatable and that certainly cannot be bridged without being in the presence of the sculptures also becomes lost, obscured by the lure of the psychic narrative. The coming to the fore of the psychic narrative, that I have characterised as a mythic narrative, depends upon the presumed simplicity (by art writers and gallerists) of the relationship between words and sculpture, a relationship I questioned at the beginning of the chapter, a simplicity that whilst quoting endlessly ignores moments like this remark to Stuart Morgan: 'I never talk literally. Never, never, never. You do not get anywhere by being literal, except to be puny. You have to use analogy and interpretation and leaps of all kinds.'[61] A remark we must also be wary of taking at face value; acknowledging its rhetorical worth, its strategic use in the context of the social – and often combative – space of the interview, its declarative – potentially mythic – simplicity and remembering its very real demand of the reader – and of herself – to rise beyond the literal level.

Characterizing Bourgeois' work in this way is not to undermine or deny the highly personal, psychological position from which Bourgeois now speaks. It is instead to assert that this form of discourse has become so prevalent in the mass of literature on Bourgeois' work that it has obscured other ways of seeing her work. It has been to open up Bourgeois' work to other narratives, to other ways of speaking, that this chapter has been oriented. Placing the historical over the hypostatizing has, rather perversely, been a fruitful method, revealing as it does how the monographic approach to Bourgeois has been thematic and a-historical whilst appearing chronological because her work, if seen chronologically, *is* largely in periods identifiable by material and method. Placing the studio over the psychic has also been fruitful in revealing another kind of history of Bourgeois' forms. One that is about contemporary methods, of casting, of practices of repetition and assemblage, of collection and discard that foreground the *material*, the *sculptural*, the *practice*, in a body of work that is disappearing under the weight of its attendant psychic narratives. It was never an intention of this chapter to 'close' the gap, or desiccation, or cure the anarthria with which it began but instead to show how it has only

[61] Louise Bourgeois to Stuart Morgan (1988) in Bourgeois (1998) p. 155.

seemed to have been closed by the advent of the attendant psychic narratives. We are no closer to this work though, to this work which was profoundly difficult to speak. What has happened is that the peculiar, silent, heavy materiality of this work has disappeared, as the narratives of later years are projected back upon it.

I have inferred from Bourgeois' earliest objects a real struggle to make and this is to an extent a personal reading, but it is also a reading off the surface; off the brute, raw, utilitarian, almost accidental looking surface. A plaster surface that we recognize as more akin to the outside of the waste mould rather than the worked plasters of, say, Frink. The surface of these objects, of *Spiral / Summer*, *Life Flower 1*, *Maison*, *Figure* and *Lair* grates and seems to reflect our struggle as audience, critic and writer. These are objects that we struggle with, whose silence is almost palpable. Whose silence may be an act of speech in an Austinian fashion, a grunt, an utterance and perhaps this should be the direction of new research on Bourgeois' work of this period, to question what the vocality and silence of this work says of the language of criticism; what it says of our subjectivity and our desire for the psychic narratives that Bourgeois later gives with such abundance. Some moves in this direction have already been made: Krauss has called upon Bataille and the 'informe' and Read's notion of the 'terribilita' might also be useful. Perhaps it is time that this silence found voice in criticism.

Historically, I argue that there is a turn away from this kind of mute work and the consequential development of narratives outside the work. I am not presenting a sudden shift, but a gradual development of a type of work – alongside other types that continue to be made – and a development of a kind of narrative that is more successful than Bourgeois' more allusive or mute objects. For instance, Bourgeois does continue to use latex, her most visceral surface, at the end of the 1960s and beyond. These are no longer small, independent sculptures but large set pieces,[62] *Confrontation* (1978) and *The Destruction of the Father* (*Le Repas Soir*, 1974) which depend upon the look, scale and even temporality of the theatrical experience. The attendant narrative or actual script (in the case of *The Banquet – a Fashion Show of Body Parts* which took place within *Confrontation*) places the viewer as audience and moves the latex lumps from sculpture towards prop. Again, these works are framed differently historically by the rise of the feminist arts movement with whom Bourgeois was, rather ambivalently, involved.[63] Yet the methods that came to make these set-pieces, of salvage, accretion, repetition, casting and discard remain throughout her career, from the marble cores in *No 72, (The No March)*, to the nostalgia steeped accumulations of the *Cells*.

In place of the downright difficult work (to make and to see) of the 1950s and early 1960s comes a more narrative, allusive object, a new conception of sculpture that relies upon both a verbal narrative and a visual lexicon, which includes the polished marble surfaces of illusionistic stone, such as *Cumul 1* (1968) and later in the *Cells*, the reassuringly loaded objects from the attic. Alongside this change to a form of sculpture that relishes its legibility over the near illegible, hyphenated, earlier work Bourgeois, I argue, develops mythical, metaphorical structures of thought that guide our looking, or rather our *not seeing*. I hope to have given examples to show

[62] Rifkin (1995).

that this is an activity that suffuses the discourse around her and has done since her launching New York retrospective in 1982 at the very latest.

So what of the gap with which I began, the work as a stranger to its maker? The problem of connectivity will not disappear within a new mythical structure; it has become the creative tension in the work that has led Mignon Nixon and Briony Fer to concentrate upon this moment. The strangeness of this work arising from the processes – shaping and pouring, collecting and selecting and refabricating – will always leave open questions of incompleteness and inclusion, whatever narratives we wrap about the sculptures. Cast off pieces discarded from one object return as fragments in new pieces, within lumpen groupings or *Cells* revealing a practice of working and reworking that is a fundamentally modernist approach to making sculpture. The modernism of Bourgeois' practice has become hidden; one might say that in this decade Bourgeois begins to transform the allegorical structure of her work: in her early work the first level of meaning is visibly a modernist formalism and the second level is a psychic symbol.[64] In the later works, the first level is a psychic drama beyond which is a second level of modernist modalities.

All through the 1960s when the possibilities for what an art object might be were rapidly changing and dissolving, Bourgeois continued to be committed to a modernist singular, communicative object and explored traditional sculptural problems; of the spiral, of the hung form, of representing the figure. Bourgeois' work is a long way from Lippard's dissolution of the art object or Judd's replicated multiples. There has then been no attempt here to place Bourgeois in the context of her contemporaries in, say, *Eccentric Abstraction*. Such an activity would have been rather irrelevant to my purposes and I also believe, following on from my first chapter, that Bourgeois took a longer view. In wanting to make a thing of her own, I believe, Bourgeois wanted to achieve some thing that would live in a kind of history of modernist sculptural forms, a history that would include Picasso's restructuring of the figure and Calder's mobiles. Bourgeois wanted to update her work for the new generation, the new moment, but also finding new materials was itself an accepted modernist method likely to reveal the new form, and indeed it did, in the gloopy growths of the 'cumul' type. I think if one were to search for those to whom Bourgeois might have looked then perhaps it would be to France that I would turn, particularly, Henri Etienne-Martin. Bourgeois knew of, and respected, his work and there are the kinds of similarities of form, subject and psychic function between the 'Lairs' and Etienne-Martin's long series, *Les Demeures*, that one might call upon. If I were to posit anything about Bourgeois' professional strategy in this chapter it would be this: Bourgeois needs to place herself in this moment of the emergence of rise of the alternatives to the genre minimalism, and comes up with a strategy – a strategy of myth – that is between the other positions of the time (near minimalism, near anti-form and so forth). This is not to imply that this is an artificial or false process because it is something that happened gradually, a strategy Bourgeois discovered because it worked, just like it worked when Bourgeois poured plastic over her small plaster casts. The installation *The Death of the Father* becomes Bourgeois' first fully fledged scenario-

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[63] See chapter three for more detail on Bourgeois' complex relationship to feminism.
[64] I owe this idea entirely to Alex Potts.

sculpture, creating the myth of the unmediated encounter with the work through the directness of its attendant narrative and so eliding the gap between us and the work. It is Bourgeois' work of the 1960s that paves the path towards this moment.

3 Bourgeois Truth: Strategies in Interviews and Images

Appropriating Bourgeois

Louise Bourgeois' relationship to the feminist arts networks of the 1970s and feminism as an ethical position has been a grumbling, ongoing problem for monograph and press writers and academics. Partly because, whilst those with a theoretical agenda have claimed Bourgeois, she claims none; insisting upon her non-membership of groups, her distance from movements and her isolation (examined in chapter one). What emerges is a certain conflict between the archival evidence of who Bourgeois showed with, and mixed with, in the 1970s and her claimed position and a certain ambiguity in how Bourgeois' name and image are used in contemporary texts. Further, Bourgeois' position is now iconic and, rather simplistically perhaps, we might draw a comparison between Bourgeois' situation and the problems Margaret Thatcher presents to feminist historians. Twenty five years after her historic election as the first female Prime Minister she is a tremendous role model for women and yet she has been consistently dismissive of feminist activism and did not promote women when in power.

Although Bourgeois' position may not be so visible it has led to some rather surprising ways of dealing with her work, primarily in negotiating her inclusion within the feminist frame and within the umbrella of 'Women's Art'. Judy Chicago's and Edward Lucie-Smith's *Women and Art – Contested Territory* and essays such as Joanna Freueh's contribution to *The Power of Feminist Art*,[1] both elide these difficulties in Bourgeois' position. Instead, they describe a theme of feminist art (for instance, androgyny), a motif (such as woman and the domestic), or a shift in possibilities opened up by women's art (for example, imaging the body) and then cite Bourgeois' work, by name or illustration. These citations of work, sometimes made many years previously, are used in the text as brief illustrations of 'important' work without further connecting Bourgeois and her practice directly to the argument of the paper. Such a strategy appropriates Bourgeois by default rather than through a considered engagement with her position. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard present another tactic in their introduction to *The Power of Feminist Art*, by locating Bourgeois as a 'pre-feminist'; which whilst acknowledging her different chronological position, nevertheless pulls her into a prefiguring position. Broude and Garrard observe that the pre- and post-feminist generation are being given critical priority over the 1970s artists, a backlash resulting in the restoration of precisely the masculinist narrative that this generation had tried to disrupt. They write:

> The art of such pre-feminist women as Louise Bourgeois, for example, is assimilated by the mainstream only to the extent that it can be understood to have internalised the man-centred focus of the traditional woman... Resurrected now after decades of neglect (she was the only woman to be included in the Guggenheim Museum's inaugural show for its

[1] Judy Chicago and Edward Lucie-Smith, *Women and Art: Contested Territory* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1999); Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (Eds.) *The Power of Feminist Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1984).

> SoHo branch in 1992, selected at the last minute to counter and forestall further objections to that show's traditionalist all-male line-up), Bourgeois' intuitive and perversely metamorphic imagery is being used and positioned critically to prop up the old stereotypes rather than challenge them, and she herself is being used as a role model to support the relegation and confinement of women artists to work that 'deals with sexual identity' in its most limited and dualistic sense... What is genuinely radical and rebellious about Bourgeois' woman centred art is being further submerged into being a 'link' between masculinist movements.[2]

Whereas Bourgeois' intuitive and perversely metamorphic imagery is being used in the same text to broaden the claims of the 'power' of 'feminist' art by forging a 'link' historically (to an earlier generation) and territorially (contemporaneously): Bourgeois in the 1970s was in a position to be repeatedly included in mostly male, sculpture exhibitions. Bourgeois in the 1970s occupied the position of token woman in all male exhibitions as her archive demonstrates. Her art then and now is being used to connect more radical practices to the mainstream. What Broude and Garrard analyse in terms of a struggle against male hegemony, Laura Cottingham frames as a relationship of female antagonism to modernism.[3] She suggests that the explorations of feminist artists took place without serious regard for the fundamental prerequisites of artistic value according to the dominant assumptions of post-war America and Europe. Women artists asserted the political nature of the personal, refused a formalist perspective, insisted upon the importance of content, favoured collective production, asserted the autobiographical, reclaimed craft, emphasized processes and performance, and refuted the idea that art is neutral, universal and male. Just as Bourgeois' position sits uneasily within a political conception of the feminist arts movement, so her work sits uneasily within a feminist, aesthetic analysis. Bourgeois dallied with performance in *A Fashion Show of Body Parts* (1978), but has always maintained a profoundly formal approach to her work as *Number Seventy Two (The No March)* (1972) attests.

Whether considered in terms of political activism or aesthetics, there is an issue here but it is not one of who has the greater claim upon Bourgeois: the mainstream or the radical. It is rather that this openness to appropriation – which may even be a characteristic of Bourgeois' work – requires investigation in and of itself. For, it is clear that Bourgeois has managed to maintain this location 'in-between' other positions, both in her work and in her actions, over many years. Helen Potkin has made a similar argument in her work on Dora Gordine where she argues that Gordine placed herself strategically 'in between' the positions of artists around her as well as 'in between' cultures.[4] It is also a similar argument to that with which I closed the last chapter, regarding Bourgeois' placing of her work in the 1960s in between the movements around it.

There is then little to be gained in terms of the appropriation and re-appropriation *of* Bourgeois but both positions, the feminist (evolving a transforming aesthetic) and the canonical-masculinist (embodied in post World War Two modernism), figure Bourgeois as a passive player: there to be claimed. This thesis challenges that passivity. The first chapter considered Bourgeois' early work in terms of her engagements and active self-positioning within the field of possibility before

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[2] Ibid., pp. 19-20.
[3] Laura Cottingham, 'The Feminist Continuum' in Broude and Garrrard pp. 276-88.
[4] Helen Potkin, 'Constructing Identities: Dora Gordine in 1920s Paris', spoken paper at *Practice and Identity: Women, Sculpture and Place* (Kingston University: May 2004).

her in New York during and after World War Two. The last chapter traced a set of studio strategies that Bourgeois developed in the 1960s that enabled her to renew her practice for a new milieu. Here, I would like to look at Bourgeois' relationship to feminist art practices in the 1970s in terms of her own strategies and self positioning. I discover that the 'in-between', which for Broude and Garrard is a weakness, is precisely what Bourgeois has wanted. In the last chapter I questioned the use of quotations and interviews in press and critical articles, focusing on the complex relationship between words, work and self positioning. I argued that Bourgeois incorporates words as sculptural material in her work and so their status as 'objective' source material cannot be maintained. Further, critical writing fails to acknowledge both the creative (or sculptural) impulse in Bourgeois' language use and the importance of the specific moment of speech, Bourgeois' words often have rhetorical or pointed purpose within the situation in which they arose. I would like to pursue this strategy here, in relation to the politics and aesthetics of the 1970s, by considering an example of Bourgeois' language strategy in relation to her professional career: the interview. From this examination, questions arise about Bourgeois' subject position whose investigation forms the concluding part of the chapter.

What is your intention?

The difficulty of attempting to come to terms with Bourgeois' relationship with feminist art practices is clearly shown in her interview with Jennifer Dalsimer from 1986 (J.D.).[5] As yet unpublished, this interview is unique in its focus upon the period of the 1970s and Bourgeois' relation to feminist positions, activists and artists and the operations of the art world. The situation of the interview, that is the social space that Bourgeois negotiated, was one where Bourgeois immediately took the upper hand with a young and inexperienced interviewer; but an interviewer with a clear agenda. Dalsimer, a college student, was researching a project hoping to trace Bourgeois' links to the feminist arts movement in the USA in the 1970s. Below is an extensive excerpt from a long interview, necessarily extended because by reproducing the to and fro of the conversation it is possible to highlight both the importance of the interviewer and her agenda, and how Bourgeois' words change and make available the specificity of the historical moment in which the interview takes place.[6] It is my hope to retain the presentness of these words as spoken in 1986, of Bourgeois looking back and historicising her past which I believe prevents these words from becoming an authoritative statement. I want to keep open the possibility that in 1976 and perhaps in 2006 Bourgeois felt or might feel differently about the same period, the same events. Collections on Feminism such as Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock's *Framing Feminism* share a view that the mid 1980s was a time of backlash against feminist arts on both sides of the Atlantic and this general trend of distancing oneself from the work, women and moment of 1970s radicalism forms part of the landscape in which this interview took place. Finally, by concentrating on a lengthened extract rather than pull-quotes, we are able to see Bourgeois' position shift and melt with her changes in mood and her shifting

[5] Louise Bourgeois papers (Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution) my own transcription.
[6] My transcription attempts to disentangle the moments when both speak at once and does not includes the 'err's that Bourgeois habitually says, but otherwise tries to be as accurate as possible to what was said rather than how what was said might form a grammatical sentence.

relationship to the interviewer. A short extract would not have been true to the combination of definitiveness and ambivalence articulated by Bourgeois.

Bourgeois begins the interview by ensuring she has editorial control of her comments by taping the interview herself (so they sit with two tape machines between them) and by insisting that Dalsimer submits her edited version to Bourgeois before publication. This agreement is, of course, recorded on the tape. Bourgeois' insistence upon editorial control can be traced back as far as 1966 and her interview with John Jones.[7] As this earlier interview ended, Robert Goldwater returned home and insisted upon listening to the reels before letting Jones leave. There has been much speculation about the implications of Goldwater's actions on this day for their marriage and for Bourgeois' stop-start career, but what Goldwater's actions in 1966 clearly did was to initiate a pattern of control by Bourgeois over her public interactions; one that she has continued to the present.[8] Bourgeois' interview with Colette Roberts in 1968 reveals considerable editing and excising of material on Bourgeois' part.[9] This interview, thirty six years old, is still strictly controlled and I required Bourgeois' written permission to read the transcript. It may initially appear that this level of control runs throughout the course of Bourgeois' interviews. The editing by Bourgeois of her interview with Colette Roberts, in fact, suggests an oscillation between speaking freely, declaratively, and even insultingly and reining this in by changing the temperature of her relationship with her interviewer and, if necessary, deleting parts of the tape. Relevant here is how Bourgeois tries to recover control in 1994 after she has failed to agree editorial control with Nigel Finch during filming of *Arena: Louise Bourgeois*. After Finch refuses to cede editorial control to Bourgeois she retaliates by belittling him (such as mocking his choice of prawns that gave him food poisoning) and by taking an overtly defensive and combative approach to his questioning: at one point she turns on a saw, drowning his voice and ignoring him whilst she thinks and recovers her composure.

We might also note Bourgeois' reputation with those who have met and interviewed her for another kind of manipulative behaviour: leaving them feeling that they had been seduced. Accounts of Bourgeois' manner with the media illustrate her canniness and manipulative tactics. Robert Storr remarked that Bourgeois 'can be very cruel, and demanding. She can lash out... Every time I see her, she has a new trick to pull; some of them are not nice.'[10] More recently, the reporter Liz Jobey described how Bourgeois confronted her with a maquette and insisted that Jobey gave an opinion about it.[11] What is clear is that Bourgeois is rhetorically self-aware in the interview situation – in a way that most artists aren't – and that she is prepared to call upon an array of tactics, verbal, psychological and physical, to maintain control of the situation.

In the interview with Dalsimer, some eight years earlier than *Arena: Louise Bourgeois*, Bourgeois' demand for editorial control and awes Dalsimer giving Bourgeois the upper hand.

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[7] Also unpublished.
[8] Interestingly, Robert Hughes comments on a general rise in artists and dealers exercising control over what is written or broadcast about the work, through copyright law, in 'That's Showbusiness', *The Guardian* (June 30, 2004) pp. 12-13.
[9] The transcript reveals at least eight separate excisions.
[10] Robert Storr to Liz Jobey,' The Confessions of Louise Bourgeois', *The Guardian Weekend* (May 16, 1998) p. 21.
[11] Ibid.

Dalsimer responds to Bourgeois' demands for approval of her final version by saying her project is a senior essay and is unlikely to be published which causes Bourgeois to become insistent and forthright:

> LB: This is my point; I would like it to be published. If I am going to spend two hours with you now, right, I expect it to be published; otherwise it is not worth my time. In effect, if the essay is interesting enough I will place it for you; I will get it published, if I can. There are certainly demands for this kind of text.[12]

Dalsimer is audibly intimidated and Bourgeois' offer to get the material published, *if* it is good enough, is an intimation of power that leaves Dalsimer silent. Whilst Bourgeois sounds dominant at this point on the tape, it becomes clear as the interview continues that both parties become less confrontational and more at ease.

The interview lasts for over an hour and Dalsimer's persistent questioning reveals her agenda:

> J.D. Ok I was trying to find a connection between your sexual imagery and your participation in different women's organisations in the 60's and early seventies.
>
> L.B. Alright, so, my answer to this is that I do not know what you mean by sexual imagery. For instance, we have here a catalogue of the museum, where do you see sexual imagery in there, I don't see it?

Bourgeois is referring to the catalogue from her MoMA retrospective of 1982. Her refusal to consider the question is blunt and there follows a prolonged dispute about the word 'sexual', which culminates in impasse and a rather reduced Dalsimer. Her preceding lines of enquiry have led nowhere and Bourgeois has pointedly ignored her attempt to describe *Fillette* and *Hanging Janus* as sexual because of their phallic imagery. Dalsimer is exasperated when she asks:

> J.D. What is your intention?
>
> L.B. My intention is to deal with the problems of women. You can put me as a feminist there. I am intrigued and worried by the inadequacy of women. So that the... what you call the sexual pieces that go inside... with the birth of my children... did not mean... they are not sexual. They represent women's problems in regards to the functions our body's functions. Well, the erotic function is just one of them.
>
> ...
>
> J.D. What about your activities with the women's movement in the sixties and seventies? You say you call yourself a feminist: did you actually partake in outside activities as well or did you—
>
> L.B. This is a completely different thing because that has nothing personal. This has to do with social problems and civil rights. Well, I try my best. As with my children I try my best, you know, to be a good citizen and I am not very good at it because artists are selfish. If they were not selfish they would not be artists.
>
> ...
>
> J.D. So what about your participation in the fight censorship movement? Was that truly just an altruistic act to help other women?
>
> L.B. It is partly because people asked me to. People told me to. People appealed to my sense of generosity. But I would not say that it was innate and I would not say that it has to do with the motivation of the work. No, because a person who speaks very well is much more useful to the women's movement or for instance a person who is a gifted organiser, is much more useful to the movement than an artist. Because an artist speaks a language that very few people understand.

[12] I can find no evidence that the essay was ever published.

J.D. But, what about the other female artist organisers within the movement. Who... do think that they are participating in a very personal way?

L.B. They are very, very pretentious.

J.D. Oh you think so?

L.B. Absolutely.

Bourgeois is disputatious, changing Dalsimer's questions ('this is a completely different thing') or avoiding direct answers ('I was exploring my own problems'). Bourgeois distances herself from the frame of reference that Dalsimer is trying to establish by separating the motivations of her work from any reference to the organisations and events to which Dalsimer hopes to connect her. Bourgeois establishes two levels: separating the artistic motivation, which is about herself as a woman and her experience, from issues of citizenry and social responsibility. When Bourgeois begins 'you can put me as a feminist there', it seems to be a magnanimous gesture of good grace; having won the long dispute over the word sexual. On the other hand, it may represent a stepping back: Bourgeois feeling that she has gone too far in so thoroughly quashing Dalsimer's initial, enthusiastic and rather naïve attempts to link Bourgeois' sculpture to feminist activism. A certain ambivalence emerges when Bourgeois claims to tackle the problems of women and then draws back into a totally personal and subjective motivation. At no point in the entire interview does Bourgeois mention any involvement with a particular organisation or pressure group. At each point (as above) she transforms the question into something else, such as one's social duty. As Dalsimer tries to get Bourgeois to remember and asks questions in increasing detail, so Bourgeois becomes more vague ('people told me to').

In response to Bourgeois' tactics, Dalsimer shows her a photograph taken on March 14 1979 to commemorate a dinner party held by the feminist movement in her honour.[13] Dalsimer is literally holding the evidence of Bourgeois' involvement (in something) before her eyes:

J.D. So can I ask you a question? So what about some of the artists in this photograph, then? Do you remember this photograph? This was in the—

L.B. Well let me see that... Well, this is exactly what you said. The feminist movement ask me to give a party. That has to do with the reputation of the artist. For instance, today I like to talk about... this is a very social, social life. I am going to have a show in May, right. The work is here, I would rather talk about the coming work, not that past work, and the Palladium,

J.D. Is that where it is going to be?

L.B. No. I am very close to the Palladium for some reason. The Palladium call Robert Miller, my gallery, and the Palladium say do you want to give a party for Louise. Right. Because this is part of the public relation system of the eighties. This was before this is ten years before. The mores of the time meant that the feminist movement ask me to give a party right? So sure enough I give a party.

J.D. So just to have a good time, nothing more?

L.B. Because it did something, it brought the movement to some kind of exposure.

J.D. Ok. So if—

L.B. Now I remember this very well. It meant a lot to me. So they said we will send you a number of artists that have a... [Unclear on tape] reputation and I said no. I don't want that at all, at all. I am not a do gooder I am not going to give a party for the big cheese. In

[13] The attendees are listed in Deborah Wye, *Louise Bourgeois* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1982) p. 108.

French we say the big lugeur [Unclear on tape] this is not my intention at all, I couldn't do it. But I am very willing to give a party for my own friends.

[Tape stops and is replaced]

J.D. So you were continuing that this was a party of your friends. That you had selected.

L.B. Very much so. That's why in the MoMA catalogue Debbie wrote all the names of the women who were there. Every one of these people meant something to me.

J.D. Did you participate in conversations with these women that helped you define your ideas?

L.B. I had a relation to everyone of them and usually my relations are very easy to anticipate. I like the people I admire.

J.D. So, For instance. Why would you admire Hannah Wilke then? Well, why would you admire Hannah Wilke then?

L.B. Well Hannah Wilke and I we had been in the early days of the erotic movement. We did erotic art. Well, you know friendships are evanescent, they are very warm and then you lose interest, some people become successful, some people go down the drain, some people you never see, some people resent you, some people come and like you. There is a great deal of fluctuation in friendships.

J.D. But what would have drawn you to these particular women at this time? The style of art?

L.B. Yes. The erotic. I did erotic art when it was not known. You know the Fillette.

J.D. So why are you calling it erotic now when before you were saying it wasn't sexual?

L.B. Yes, well I call it erotic but I don't call it sexual.

Bourgeois is at first unwilling to talk about the photograph, preferring to discuss her upcoming show and implying that Dalsimer's subject is just not as interesting but then, quite suddenly, she is able to recall her own demands for this event ('it meant a lot to me'), abandoning her earlier vagueness. She is once again ambivalent: first undermining the feminist agenda of the event, subsuming it into a PR event for both her gallery and the feminist movement, and further, she switches from using the words 'the feminist movement' to the more ambiguous and distant 'Palladium'. Yet, at the same, time Bourgeois holds true to a feeling of admiration for the women as artists. It is noticeable that she rarely refers to the attendees as women but rather as friends or simply people. At every point Bourgeois both personalises and de-genders the conversation. Bourgeois is ambiguous about her relationship with Hannah Wilke, moving quickly from her as an individual with a strong political agenda in her practice to the general ebb and flow of artistic friendships. In framing Wilke in this rather mild way Bourgeois mentions the 'erotic art movement,' and Dalsimer becomes understandably frustrated that Bourgeois is now prepared to call her work erotic and even imply that she was an erotic pioneer when she refused the term so adamantly at the beginning of the interview. Bourgeois showed at the Erotic Art gallery in 1974, a gallery where Judy Chicago also exhibited. Indeed a black marble version of *Sleep* became the publicity image for the exhibition.

Dalsimer presses on with the picture:

J.D. I would like to go back to this photograph again and get some more factual information and you said that these women were friends of yours and it was part of the erotic movement in the women's movement. How, was it just purely conversational that you were involved? Or did you participate in other activities with these women. Would you say it was anything formal?

L.B. No it was always the same situation which is not particularly interesting that is to say the professional ambition.

J.D. So it was just a group of women who wanted to push their work further?

L.B. Absolutely, absolutely. But I don't object to that.

J.D. But what about the conversations that would come out of such a meeting?

L.B. There was not very much of that. There was a notion of who is successful and who fails to be successful. So this is not terribly, terribly interesting.

J.D. Do you think that makes it harder for women?

L.B. Very difficult, very difficult. That women are rivals of each other.

J.D. Rivals of each other, and do you think that maybe they take second class within the art-world itself perhaps? Do you think they are always fighting against—?

L.B. Ah, well that becomes a philosophical approach. I can say that when you say I am a victim, you are likely to stay a victim. So to admit the fact that women are discriminated against; I find it a negative attitude.

J.D. A negative attitude on their part? And not on society's part—

L.B. It is a negative attitude on their part.

J.D. Well if you look at your career would you say that you were considering yourself a victim since you were not—?

L.B. Never. I have never considered myself a victim. Never. You grow up. The test of growing up is to see your parents ah, poor devils. And people scream when I say it. [Pause] If you see your father and mother but I say to my own children if you see your father and mother and you say oh they were too successful for us and we're bad parents – absurd, it is an absurd statement. On the day they see the parents as struggling artists, the poor devils, it is very blunt but it is what I mean then it means that you have grown up. You are an adult. So that to see myself as a victim of society, the galleries, the gallery system, as a victim of anything is... would mean that I would be a depressed person and I cannot stand that, I fight against depression.

J.D. What about—

L.B. In fact it is the women, and this I am very, very sensitive about, it is the women gallery owners who are the most anti women, because they want to, and this subject I do know. Why? Because the women gallery owners want to have a little court of young men and they get it. In the eighties.

JD: A court of young men artists?

L.B. Absolutely, absolutely. So this is reality. It is not some dream of the feminist movement. It is just the way the game is played.

Bourgeois continues to undermine any sense of fellowship, kinship or altruism that Dalsimer is trying to establish: the women simply wanted to promote their work. They were rivals not sisters and shared no special understanding as women. She describes a world that is ambitious, pragmatic and selfishly ruthless, not mutually supportive and politically charged. Such a memory is a profound rejection of the community and collectivity that the women's movement fostered and historically claims as both a political position and as undermining of the individualism of modernist practice. Not only does Bourgeois insist on her own isolation in this passage but she implies that fellowship and community did not exist for any of the women: they were all only there out of professional ambition. In the light of the nature of the New York School outlined in chapter one, in which refusal of collectivity and community, a sense of disillusionment and betrayal were requisite, then Bourgeois' vehement rejection may be indicative of Bourgeois' s conception of artistic identity as necessitating refusal. For again there

is ambivalence. Although critical of what she describes as the negative attitude of victim hood, Bourgeois is simultaneously bitter about her sex preventing her progress with women gallerists. This is the only moment in the entire interview when Bourgeois acknowledges that there might be a force that is 'anti-women'; that there might be discrimination that can be so described and her anger is aimed at women. Bourgeois' bitterness is, as we know, not merely fictitious polemic. For instance, Virginia Dwan was well known for her all-male stable in the 1960s as was Mary Boone whose gallery in 1982 listed no women artists. Boone said in interview in 1982, 'sculpture is hard to sell. And women. I'll always take a great woman artist, but the museum hierarchies won't accept them'.[14] Boone is suggesting that her situation was more ruthless commercialism than female vanity and that the inherent sexism that the feminist arts movement was fighting was a real phenomenon.

We also see in this extract Bourgeois twisting her answer to include one of her stock aphorisms: a variation of 'You'd better grow up'. It remains unclear (to me at least) how seeing ones parents as artists links to the victim attitude and its abandonment but this passage brilliantly illustrates a very important and frequent tactic in Bourgeois' interviews: to formulate an answer through referring to one of a set of often used ideas and catch-phrases. Bourgeois shifts between the declarative certainty of her prepared positions (the moment of growing up or the refusal to acknowledge the sexual allusions in her work) and her more equivocal answers that each act as a new gloss. Her aphorisms, whilst apparently simple when held in tension with other shifting positions, can be dense, obscure or emptied out through repetition. We might say that 'you'd better grow up' fits all three modes. Although Bourgeois has used this shifting tactic many times in this interview, 'I fight against depression' for instance. It is most explicit here and it is a tactic that makes Bourgeois an unusually provocative and simultaneously evasive interviewee. She is able to mesmerically shift the sands of the discussion by reviving her phrases and reinterpreting them. This may be one reason why her quotes are so well known and, at the same time, so little critiqued. For they are apparently elements of clarity in what is an ongoing shift: according to the person and the moment of the interview. This may also be part of the reason why Bourgeois' work is so open to appropriation for look closely enough at her archive and she is bound to have said something that fits one's own position at some point!

Dalsimer emerges as a very persistent questioner, despite Bourgeois' avoidances, disputes and ambivalences, and towards the end of the interview Dalsimer asks directly about feminism:

> J.D. OK, let's talk about what your definition is of feminism—
>
> L.B. Feminism is a very healthy problem. I see everyday life in terms of problems that you have to resolve.
>
> J.D. What is the feminist problem?
>
> L.B. The feminist problem is that women have to be proud of being women and accept the unfortunate terms of the situation today and do what they can to get better, better educated.
>
> J.D. So do you think your work is doing that? Do you think your work is advocating that stance?

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[14] Mary Boone to Anthony Haden-Guest, *New York Magazine* (April 19, 1982) p. 25, quoted in Mira Schor, 'Backlash and appropriation', *Broude and Garrard*, p. 251.

L.B. Yes. My work is optimist in that sense. So you have to work twice as much.

J.D. Because you're working for—

L.B. Because we are a minority. It is the eternal problem of the minorities.

Whilst Bourgeois does recognise that women are effectively a minority, her definition of feminism is one of personal challenge, and therefore one that implicitly rejects collective, or political, action. As becomes clear at the very end of the interview, it is the rivalry between women that Bourgeois is most angry about and finds most distressing:

> J.D. Do you think that in many ways you felt a kinship with them because they were also creating pieces that —?
>
> L.B. No but we could communicate, artists understand. I like younger people, I have a not too nice memory of the people who were my contemporaries, the females, the she fox, a lair is a lair. A lair is a thing you have built yourself in order to avoid a trap. It is safe, you have built it yourself. That came from the distress that I had with my elder [tape ends]

Bourgeois again works against Dalsimer's intention: when she acknowledges fellow feeling it is as fellow artists, not as fellow women, nor as artists working with a shared intention or motivation. Indeed, this closing statement suppresses any suggestion that might have been there earlier that her friendship with (or admiration for) Wilke might be connected to their sharing a communion through the 'erotic art movement': Wilke was younger, while Bourgeois' contemporaries – artists who were involved in political activism – Bourgeois dismissed earlier in the interview as 'very, very, pretentious'. It seems that, from Bourgeois' position, the way forward for women is to work hard and achieve, but against the rivalries of women the only recourse is sculpture. Indeed, she mentions in the context of her bad memories of her contemporaries *She Fox* (1984) whose standard narrative is of Bourgeois' ambivalent relationship to her mother (plate 57).[15] This reference opens out the symbolism of *She Fox* as a mythical representation of a *negative* female essence. Sculpture here is operating as the kind of declarative statement-in-motion that we have noted and its re-reading here *overturns* its previous narrative of ambivalence and reparation. In clear contradiction to her opening position, Bourgeois clearly attributes the motivation for her work to her relationships with women artists but it is a negative relationship and it is not referenced to the work Dalsimer expected to discuss. For the *Lairs* are closer to landscape and geology than the body and, as a series, originate several years earlier than the more bodily pieces that interest Dalsimer such as *Fillette*, *Sleep 2* and the *Janus* group. We see Bourgeois slip again into repeating key phrases as she slips from her memories to describing and then almost *speaking* her *Lair* sculptures. At the same time she is transforming the Lairs themselves by imbuing them with this new reading, specific to female and peer relationships.

I hope that this extended extract gives a flavour of the difficulty of using Bourgeois' words. As I argued in chapter two, different pull-quotes from this interview would give diametrically opposed claims, for instance, as to the eroticism in her work. More importantly, how Bourgeois achieves this is clear; through control of the emotional tenor of the situation, continued reinterpretation of

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[15] See Louise Bourgeois, *Destruction of the Father Reconstruction of the Father – Writings and Interviews 1923-1997* (London: Violette Editions, 1998) p. 186.

her work and declarative statements that appear as islands of familiarity in a shifting sea, whose movements are dictated by Bourgeois' immediate needs in the interview situation. These are not islands of certainty, for sculptures and phrases operate in substitution as evocative and resonant motifs rather than as moments of clear meaning. It is within this shifting sea of verbal, substitutive technique and interpersonal performance that meaning is generated, and just as easily, dispersed.

This interview shows that in 1986, as Bourgeois' career was reaching new international heights – having undertaken a major exhibition at the Serpentine gallery in London and another in Paris (travelling to Switzerland) in the previous year – Bourgeois did not want to be pigeon-holed as a feminist artist. If Bourgeois was being appropriated to the mainstream in a masculine hegemonic backlash, there is little in this interview that gives grounds to think that Bourgeois was unhappy with this process. We might also suggest that Bourgeois' position, as expressed on this day to this interviewer is clearly and deliberately rejecting many of the values of the feminist movement. Not only does Bourgeois dismiss the collectivity and community of women artists that Dalsimer tries so hard to find but her insistence upon the separating the motivations and contents of her work from the civic sphere is a profound rejection of the praxis of integrating 'personal' and 'political' through radical methods, materials, subjects and sites for art. Bourgeois engages in a concerted attempt to frustrate Dalsimer's questioning and at every point she personalises, depoliticises and de-sexes the protagonists and events that she is often reluctant to remember.

Yet, as she talks, a certain ambiguity emerges: Bourgeois slips between seeing herself as talking about the problems of women through her work to envisioning herself talking about just her own, specific, self-understanding. Throughout the interview there is a slippage between Bourgeois as an individual artist and Bourgeois as a 'woman'. This is evidenced by her final statement that she is part of a female minority, 'it is the eternal problem of the minorities' is said with a fatalistic obviousness that belies her earlier denials and detours.[16] Further, Bourgeois' criticism of the negativity of the 'victim' mentality of feminism is tempered by her own bitterness about women gallerists and her implicit recognition of the category 'woman' as something discriminated against whilst at the same time emphasising Bourgeois' distance from *She Fox* women. More than this, Bourgeois' more subtle ambivalences are important: Bourgeois' attempts to devalue the meaning of the 1979 dinner as a part of the PR machinery but clings to her personal connections with the participants: Bourgeois plays with the allusiveness of her work. Having exhibited it as 'erotic', she adamantly denies and then matter-of-factly accepts this label. What these moments reveal is a strategy of evasion, of ambiguity, of not letting Dalsimer leave with a clear set of positions or a clear history of events and connections. This ambivalence and equivocation combined with her strategic referencing and redefining of works and phrases come together to form an important strategy in Bourgeois' interview technique that

[16] It would be interesting to compare this position in 1986 to both Bourgeois' activism with the 'Irascible 18' in the 1940s and with her earlier comments on black activism in the arts in 1968, but this not possible here. An argument can also be made for overt activism in Bourgeois' work, such as the print *Whitney Murders*, and the naming of a version of *The Blind Leading the Blind*, *C.O.Y.O.T.E.* (Come Off Your Old Tired Ethics).

permits her in-between-ness, and permits the polyvalence of her work in spite of the declarative nature of her fabulous narratives. Supporting these strategies are Bourgeois' personal tactics: how she defies, seduces, challenges or resists her interviewer, and these all combine into a potent stratagem that resists closure and the dyad of truth and falsity.

Dalsimer's opening gambit of suggesting a link between Bourgeois' imagery and her involvement with feminist organisations may have been naïve considering the cold reception it received but it was not without foundation. For Bourgeois did repeatedly exhibit as part of women only exhibitions, particularly in the early and mid 1970s. For instance, in 1974, the same year she exhibited at the Erotic Art Gallery, she also was selected to participate in the Philadelphia Cultural Alliance Festival, the exhibition, *Woman's Work, American Art 1974*, Museum of Philadelphia Civic Center.[17] She exhibited at the Women's Interart Center, New York, in *Colour Light and Image* and showed in *From Women's Eyes*, eight artists curated by four curators, at the Rose Art Museum, Brandeis [sic] University.[18] Judith Brodsky notes that the largest of these exhibitions, the Philadelphia Cultural Alliance Festival, selected Bourgeois not for her feminist stance but because she was well known: a token again, a token mainstream artist.[19] This was a particularly high profile year for Bourgeois. She also exhibited in group shows of sculpture and through her gallery at the time, Fourcade, Droll, Inc. and in December had her solo show at Green Gallery which historically is remembered as the first installation of *The Destruction of the Father.* A year earlier Bourgeois rejected Worden Day's approach to generate a self-organised women's art exhibition:

> Dear Worden, I am not altogether enthusiastic about a self-organised women's show at this point. However we can talk about it. After Sunday March 25 we can meet, if you like, at my house, on a Sunday afternoon. (Eight avenue at 23rd street – Chelsea) Let me know if a Sunday is possible for you it will be good to see you again, love Louise.

Bourgeois did not participate and selection and curation by established figures (Anne D'Harnoncourt was one of the selectors for *Women's Work*) characterise Bourgeois' participation in Women's exhibitions in 1974.

I believe we could trace a similar ambivalence in Bourgeois' sculptural practice throughout the 1970s but a brief look at one more year will, I think, suffice. Louise Bourgeois held two simultaneous solo exhibitions in 1978 and Bourgeois exhibited a wide range of work across the two galleries. At Xavier Fourcade, under the exhibition title 'Triangles', Bourgeois exhibited intensely formal works including the finished steel of *Lair of Seven* (plate 58) alongside a series of *Structures*: large, crude, assemblages made from cardboard boxes, cut diagonally across and stapled, taped or screwed on both sides of a Plexiglas tier before being hand painted bright green and red (Plate 59). At Hamilton, Bourgeois showed the similarly casual looking assemblage of *Confrontation*, the location of Bourgeois' first performance. *Confrontation* was a scaled up environment of triangular half-boxes, made of screwed together wooden boards and enclosing a banquet table of thick latex mounds. This homemade aesthetic was offset by small

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[17] Bourgeois showed *Chapiteaus* (1968) white marble (48.2 x 43.2 x 38.1 cm).
[18] One of the curators is Deborah Wye and I believe this exhibition represents the beginning of their working relationship.
[19] Judith Brodsky, 'Exhibitions, Galleries, and Alternative Spaces', Broude and Garrard, pp. 104-19.

marble and wood sculptures called *Wedges*. These seem to have fallen out of Bourgeois' archive and I can find no record of them, but Art News described one as 'a wood piece in which one wedge seems to ax [sic] or split open a wood cube.'[20] The *Structures* seem to follow directly from the kind of repetitive accruition and assemblage examined in the last chapter but their handmade scruffiness one reviewer dismisses with 'technique seems to have been given a punch in the eye.'[21] In their lack of finish, the *Structures* and *Confrontation* – where latex, staples and hand painting offsets the geometry of the construction – both speak to the kind of feminist anti-modernist aesthetic described by Laura Cottingham but this is offset with precision cutting of steel, smooth finish of marble, sheer formalism of the *Wedges* and the familiarity of the tiny *Germinal* (1968). The latter's inclusion functioned to refer back to Bourgeois' highly successful marble protrusion sculptures, rather as *Fôret – Night Garden* had looked back to earlier work in her Stable exhibition in 1964. In this major double exhibition then, the domestic emerges into the gallery in the form of cereal boxes, yet adjacent sculptures are welded steel. Bourgeois creates an installation that becomes the site of a personal sung performance yet alongside it she exhibits spare modernist objects and commercially successful marbles. Bourgeois' performers sing of improper love in the Hamilton Gallery while Xavier Fourcade shows what is arguably Bourgeois' most abstract and geometric body of work.

Beyond the issues of Bourgeois' position in the 1970s and how she reconfigures that in later decades, the Jennifer Dalsimer interview highlights the density and complexity of Bourgeois' statements in an unusually vivid manner, making clear just how much is really obscured by the technique of the pull-quote. This is especially at its most extreme where a bland paste is constructed from a-historical quotes that offer only a reductive and mysterious psychobiography (as the curation of the MoMA Oxford retrospective of 1995 and as Scott Wall-Lyon's 2002 text attest). I hope that I have shown this interview to be a moment, a snap-shot, in a long history of Bourgeois changing, rethinking and reclaiming her past and her work by reinterpreting stock aphorisms, and even her sculptures, according to the particular needs of the moment. The moment of this interview was set on many levels; according to the rise and fall of certain ideas and movements, according to the direction Bourgeois envisioned her career progressing and according to the agenda and personality of the interviewer.

Finally, I think it is important to remember that we are dealing here with events that linger on the margins of Bourgeois' quasi 'official' biographies and chronologies as they are presented within the monographs on her. If we consider that the information contained in the chronologies of these documents is generally coming out of a limited number of sources (compilers sometimes rely heavily upon previous publications or use Bourgeois' studio and archive). For instance, *Louise Bourgeois – Memory and Architecture*, accompanied an exhibition curated by Gorovoy and Danielle Tilkin and, perhaps as a consequence of Gorovoy's close links with Bourgeois, contains one of the most detailed chronologies to date and clearly brings new material out of Bourgeois' archive to add additional depth to her early years. It is a curious chronology though, concentrating heavily upon names, not only who Bourgeois knew in post war New York, a

[20] Not credited, 'New York Reviews' *Art News* (November, 1978) p. 177.
[21] Ibid.

constant fascination of these publications, but also the names of the curators and directors associated with her more recent solo exhibitions. In its coverage of the 1970s it omits to mention Bourgeois' exhibition at the Erotic Art Gallery and the exhibition in Philadelphia, whilst summarising Bourgeois' involvement with the women's movement thus: '1970, Bourgeois begins her involvement with the feminist movement, taking part in demonstrations, benefits, panels and exhibitions'[22] – a single sentence downplays the subject. None of Bourgeois' activities (demonstrations, panels) merit attention, whereas the anecdote of Bourgeois taking Gorovoy's t-shirt, dipping it in plaster and using it to form the drape that would become the base of the marble *Femme Maison* (1981) is transferred into the third person, given an entire paragraph and hence, great significance. If not an official version of Bourgeois' history, then this monographic catalogue certainly has excellent access to Bourgeois and her archive, was produced in cooperation with Bourgeois' studio and may be seen to be illustrating the trend in her presentation, a trend that is playing down her involvement in unauthorised events. Whilst the Erotic Art Gallery exhibition is ignored, other group shows, curated by significant people, are included.[23]

Child Abuse

If we may think of the interview with Jennifer Dalsimer as a snapshot, freezing or perhaps congealing a 'set' from a fluid mixture of values and views and stock aphorisms, then what of another kind of snap shot: the images of Bourgeois herself? Running alongside the dependence on context-free quotations, the monograph form has a set pattern of using images of Bourgeois as context; to picture and make vivid the biographical frame that her anecdotes and memories draw upon. Yet we shall see that, in parallel with the argument made in the last chapter about the interweaving of words into Bourgeois sculptural practice, it is also the case with her use of the photograph that the status of images of Bourgeois is not simple and clear cut. I hope to demonstrate below that photographs of and by Bourgeois do not remain as simple documents but exist in a complex relationship to her sculptural practice.

In 1982 Bourgeois published *A Project by Louise Bourgeois: Child Abuse* as artist's pages in *Artforum* magazine, timed to coincide with her MoMA retrospective. This seven page artwork positioned black and white images of her sculptures and childhood family photographs side by side accompanied by text telling the 'Sadie' story. At this moment *Child Abuse* acted powerfully to frame the MoMA exhibition in the terms of her childhood and psychic drama more than the more obvious solution of undertaking a drawing or print project would have done (as Bourgeois did for *Parkett* in 1991). Yet this piece exists as an independent artwork and so simultaneously incorporates the vintage photograph *as* sculptural solution and juxtaposes narratives of interpersonal confrontation alongside the haunting image of the fragile *Empty Houses* (1978) that themselves lean and lurch, part table, part figure. Twelve years later, in 1994, Bourgeois

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[22] Michael Unterdörfer, *Louise Bourgeois – Memory and Architecture* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro De Arte Reina Sofia) p. 293.
[23] Such as William Rubin's inclusion of *Pregnant Woman* (1947-9) in 'Primitivism in XXth Century Art' (Museum of Modern Art, New York: 1985).

published *Louise Bourgeois – Album*[24] a limited edition artist's book which accompanied photographs from her French childhood with more recent aphorisms, memories and fabulous narratives. Both of these examples blur the distinction between Bourgeois' images as documents and the images as art. In the years between *Child Abuse* and *Album*, Bourgeois began to include objects from her past in her sculptures, beginning with the *Cells*, and she has continued this in her work to the present moment: whether in the form of long-kept clothes, tapestry fragments, souvenirs or vintage household objects. So the incorporation of vintage images, appealingly fuzzy, cracked and curling objects, fits with the strategy of incorporation evident in the *Cells*, as well as with the strategies of accruition, assemblage and substitution we have already identified. Bourgeois' use of these images, in *Album* and *Child Abuse*, does not merely to flesh out a visual practice that is personal and tied closely to her youth but, instead, incorporates these images as vintage *objects*, material presences, in her art. They are chiaroscuro depictions that both parallel, and stand in place of, other ghostly presences: silent personages, standing groups and allusively drawn forms.

Paralleling our holding of Bourgeois' words and statements as complex objects of study rather than simple evidential documents, I suggest that Bourgeois' photographs should also be treated in this way – implicated in a set of sculptural strategies – perhaps as found objects, perhaps as evocative sculptural gestures. To do this calls into question the neat separation between 'biography' and 'catalogue of works' within the monograph form making the whole document complicit in the strategies of Bourgeois' sculptural practice. Strategies whose circular motion permits the kind of curation of Frances Morris's *Stitches in Time* (2004) which is an exhibition premised upon the circles Bourgeois paces through her past and her sculptural past. Circles that draw in as material what is commonly outside the work: the images of the biography and the artist's words.

Looking at the monographs on this artist, we can see that images of Bourgeois fall into three main groups. Firstly, there are archival and documentary images that show Bourgeois as a girl and place her as a historical figure within the past she now claims as her main subject.[25] Secondly, there is a significant but smaller group of images that place Bourgeois in New York and alongside (contextualising) historical figures, Warhol, Brassaï and Miró frequently figure here. The final category contains those images that position Bourgeois in terms of her work and these begin with her working on a portrait head in Wlérick's class at the Grand Chaumière (1937), and only trail off very recently as Bourgeois has become housebound. It is a surprisingly full visual archive but one steeped in nostalgia; there are very few images of Bourgeois after 1982 that show her in other contexts than in her studio or with her sculptures. Whilst there is no reason why Bourgeois should release up-to-date family photos since her photographic archive relates closely to her narratives about her work, their absence further cements the impression that there is no outside of the discourse of Bourgeois' practice. The narrowing of focus from a young girl's life to an old woman's work is traced in two parallel

[24] Louise Bourgeois, *Louise Bourgeois – Album* (New York: Peter Blum Editions, 1994) a limited edition artist's book.
[25] As cited by Frances Morris in her video and wall text accompanying *Stitches in Time* (Edinburgh: Fruitmarket Gallery, 2004).

changes: advancing film technology and increasing professionalism in the taking of photographs. The change is from fuzzy, flat, orthochromatic, black and whites of holiday snaps and intimate portraits that record the people and events of Bourgeois' early life, to the contrasty, high definition, studio-lit, professional colour images that illustrate Bourgeois and her work for the gallery, monograph and press market of the present day. Together, these changing processes, and the narrowing of subject they describe, serve to cement the impression that Bourgeois' personal life *is* available to us but it only has reality when it is a remembered life: a cracked and faded, fuzzy, black and white life. Bourgeois' personal life is apparently made real not simply when it is a representation but when it is a mysterious, nostalgic and silent representation.

The early black and white photographs came into existence in a different moment when Bourgeois was a daughter, a sister, a girl, rather than an internationally renowned and blue-chip sculptor, but their revival and repetition in this present context of financial success and critical adulation is important. The cracked and faded images have meaning through the narratives that Bourgeois tells, narratives that we have already seen are implicated within the sculptural domain of Bourgeois practice, creating tensions and dissipating potential readings, whilst appearing to be simply explanatory. Lacking the detail of colour or the voices of the largely deceased participants, it is Bourgeois who tells us that she wore a Coco Chanel dress here or a Sonia Delaunay suit there. Therefore, the images of her youth themselves become a part of the fabulous and evocative narrative of her work as the essay by Crone and Graf Schaesberg, writing here on a photograph from 1930 (plate 60), illustrates:

> If we were to stand in the steps of the Villa Pompeiana in Cimiez, not separated from the photographic subject by time and distance alone. Louise is leaning over the balustrade and her gaze travels out into nothingness, following the direction of a path without seeing it. It is almost possible to detect the slightly pungent scent of the eucalyptus trees and to hear the trilling of a single bird in the treetops.[26]

Such writing, relying upon the profound and emotive power of smell, participates in the suspended disbelief, suggesting that we can travel through time and understand and access this chiaroscuro and shadowy past; the same promise offered in Bourgeois' narrative structures.

If we are to hold such images in suspension, as objects of study, will they too reveal the kind of ambivalence, radical ambiguity,[27] substitutive strategy and tactical manipulation that emerge from Bourgeois' interview with Jennifer Dalsimer, or will another set of strategies become apparent?

Louise Bourgeois in Articulated Lair and Bourgeois Truth

I would like to consider several recent images of Bourgeois, which go beyond the incorporation of photograph as nostalgic object into her sculptural practice and the blurring of the perceived distinction between photograph as either document *or* art, examined above.

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[26] Rainer Crone and Petrus Graf Schaesberg, *Louise Bourgeois – The Secret of the Cells* (Munich: Prestel, 1998) pp. 27-8.
[27] This wonderful phrase is Joy Sleeman's.

Louise Bourgeois in Articulated Lair, 1986 (plate 61) is the most well known of the photographs taken of Bourgeois with this sculpture. In others, she stands in the doorway next to Jerry Gorovoy looking out of the dark interior but in *Louise Bourgeois in Articulated Lair, 1986* something more particular is happening. Louise Bourgeois stands in the centre of the space made by the tall partitions that form the Lair's moveable walls. She looks to the floor and looks tiny and ancient; the floor is cross hatched by lines of light and the picture plane is dominated by the pillar like partitions. Looking downwards, Bourgeois reaches her arms high above her head, her hands open, in one of her most obvious poses. There is no pretence here that she may be working or caught unawares: Bourgeois is enacting a drama for the camera. This is how Rainer Crone and Petrus Graf Schaesberg write this image:

> A dynamic figure in a denim dress flings her arms up into the air. Does this signify horror annoyance, or even despair? Her face shows neither anger, fear or shock. Her serene features convey rather a sense of meditative concentration, unfaltering determination, and immense emotional resources. Her undirected gaze is unseeing, for she is looking into an interior world. She surrenders to her imagination, as though listening to an echo that reflects a wealth of memories abundant in experiences and allows her visions to generate new images in her mind's eye... A photograph has frozen time into a single moment, capturing spontaneous movement, immortalizing it – a living monument, a statue of Louise Bourgeois at over seventy.[28]

Crone and Graf Schaesberg are among the most artful of those writers who draw out Bourgeois' own images within the monograph form, and here they both monumentalize Bourgeois and re-imbue the moment of the shutter's movement with a curious mix of dynamism and stillness. Bourgeois is both flinging and meditative. Their writing in fact suggests a whole ceremony, to which we are witness, invoking Bourgeois as a shaman whose gesture captured here induces visions: a whirlwind of memory, a welling up of pure creativity caught in the serenity of this tiny but statuesque body. Their suggestion that here Bourgeois is a living monument is remarkably acute, for the image places her as the centre and the fulfilment of a sculpture that we experience as powerfully empty. Bourgeois' narrative suggests that *Articulated Lair* is a quiet and lonely place, where one sits on the little stool (not pictured), contemplating refuge, fear or escape:

> It is a circle with two openings. It is a "lair". You can come in, sneak into it by a very small door, and there is another small door at the other end to get out. It looks like a trap but if you were clever even though it is deserted and terribly lonely, you could get in and out. Inside, there is just one, tiny stool. Nobody's around. It is a place to face the fact that there is nothing – nothing to expect. You can sit there. It is not unsafe but it is empty. Nobody can hurt you. You are not even afraid of being hurt. You are afraid of being alone.[29]

Such a powerful and dramatic description of the psychological power of the space does not seem to require anything more, and yet agreeing to be photographed within *Articulated Lair*, Bourgeois does not elect to pose within the bounds of her own narrative, seated and contemplative. Instead, she stands looking to the floor, her open hands akin to the broad open-heart gesture of the priest during mass; she seems to be directing something downwards along the straight line of her body and through her carefully placed forefoot. This photograph, in the

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[28] Crone and Graf Schaesberg, p. 11.
[29] Louise Bourgeois interviewed by Robert Storr (1986) *Parkett* (no. 9) pp. 82-5.

ekphrasis of Crone and Graf Schaesberg immortalises Bourgeois as somehow beyond human. She is, in their imagery, surrendering her selfhood to this intangible beyond: she is Tiresias, she is a Sybil, a seer, a medium, a voodoo priestess, perhaps even Saint Teresa, whose visions Bernini froze into a marble statue at her moment of surrender.

Bourgeois' dramatic pose fills the emptiness of *Articulated Lair* as expressed in her accompanying narrative; it is as if she somehow *completes* the installation. The photograph, *Louise Bourgeois in Articulated Lair, 1986*, is not an image of the maker simply alongside their work. Instead, Bourgeois performs in a very particular way that *activates* a white, cold space, and consequently that space becomes dependent upon the presence, or imagined presence, of Bourgeois herself. Bourgeois' work is often considered in terms of emotional confrontation; for instance, in the *Personages* and later the *Cells* where objects stand in for people in very literal substitutions. Yet *Articulated Lair* reeks of emptiness, the solitary stool calls to the audience to participate and experience a psychologically intense moment. This is, according to Bourgeois' narrative, our event rather than another's tableau. Bourgeois' presence in the image, however, hides the chair. She is not enacting our experience as audience but in some way she seems to resolve the ambivalent emptiness of the installation through her grand, and even possessive, performative pose. As we have seen, her theatrical gesture does not function within the frame of her own narrative but instead operates within the wider discourse around the work: at the level of the monograph, of sales, of creating the right aura to make the work successful. In this process, of posing for the publicity shot, Bourgeois' body *becomes absorbed into her narrativity*; a very literal symbolism, of personages, of pared down symbolic substitutions, becoming the statue Crone and Graf Schaesberg note. At the level of myth, *Louise Bourgeois in Articulated Lair* contributes to the mythological production of Louise Bourgeois within the dominant mode as a maker who (barely) contains an unspecified power and whose practices, or even rites, bring forth objects of power. More importantly, at the level of material, Bourgeois' person is transformed into sculpture in order to picture Bourgeois' persona at the level of the market.

Louise Bourgeois in Articulated Lair is a snapshot and a single publicity statement that has come to be used again and again as a timeless statement rather as Bourgeois' historically specific quotes have done. In the light of my above comments upon how Bourgeois controls what is printed about her, it is worthwhile remembering that her concern with the control of her public persona extends to photography:

> Gorovoy tells me how, when other photographers come to take her picture, she waits until they have finished setting up before coming in and insisting that she will only be photographed this way or that. She carefully monitors the results, keeping those pictures that she does not like.[30]

I have been concerned to retain the momentary contingency of Bourgeois speaking, but I also hope I have shown that her statements are complicit within her sculptural practice. Both in her use of words as material in her work and in her complex interview strategy: where stock phrases blend with shifting positions in an often combative struggle for control with the interviewer. Hence with Bourgeois' image in *Articulated Lair*, instead of incorporating vintage photographs

[30] Mark Irving, 'The Triumph of Bourgeois Values' *The Independent on Sunday*, (7 May, 2000) p. 4.

into her work, she incorporates herself into her work in an image which is *both* publicity photograph and at the same time a powerful *completion* of the empty space of the Lair and a therefore sculptural gesture that resists the installation's own accompanying narrative. By establishing this semantic tension between image and sculpture-with-narrative Bourgeois again creates the possibility for meaning and allusion to shift the *next time* she requires this motif.

There are many images of Bourgeois pictured with her work in a performative manner that alludes to her having a mystical power and hence, historically, to the notion of the Divino Artista. The Divino Artista beginning with the Platonic 'idea', was originally embodied in creative vision and transformed over time into the divine message, which became inspiration from God through the notion of God as creative force, as the architect of the universe. Alongside the hand of God, the Divino Artista inherited Plato's creative (not clinical) insanity of seers and poets and, in the nineteenth century with the advent of psychiatry, this became a clinical madness that transformed divine inspiration into a condition of the mind – one's gift, one's genius required one's mental illness and suffering. It is a trope Bourgeois toys with. For instance, the cover of the Museum of Modern Art Oxford's 1995 publicity leaflet that accompanied its exhibition of Bourgeois' prints and sculpture shows Bourgeois leaning upon one of the *Cumulus* sculptures (plate 62). Although the shot is lit from above, her face seems to radiate a strange glow or inner light. It is as if in this image we can see the inner forces: the violence, the fortitude, the independence and self-reliance, the writhing unconscious, that are the tropes of the dominant discourse on Bourgeois' work and career; made tangible here as a visible energy. It is almost possible that her light is being transmitted down those long sleeves to the glowing marble she touches. There is of course an interesting tangent here to the related notion of genius, which as Christine Battersby outlines is a gendered concept; genius is male in origin and descent, and also inevitably tied up to a potent and virile sexuality.[31] It may emerge in future studies that Bourgeois' ambivalent relationship to the women's movement may connect to her modernist understanding of sculpture's history: the example set by the (potent) genius of Picasso (and are reminded, of course, of the anecdotal allusions to her own potency: her power to seduce). For the moment however, such speculations are a distraction. The aura that we see in the MoMA Oxford photograph, the light that connects Bourgeois' glowing face to her marble mounds through her touch, results from 'dodging' during printing. It is either the result, or the by-product, of the intention to lighten the shadow that falls over Bourgeois' face, but whilst it may be a shame that Bourgeois does not really glow, it is an indication of the construction, of a very particular, very powerful and strange, Louise Bourgeois.

Similarly, a photograph from 1975 shows Bourgeois barefoot, walking and touching *The Blind Leading the Blind* as if about to enter between its woody pillars.[32] Another shows Bourgeois touching, but not looking at her, *Personages* (plate 63, taken 1975). Her head is turned away with a modesty that is virginal, but her eyes are lost in darkness and it appears as if her touch is communicating, not simply about, but *to* these works. This repeated presentation of Bourgeois as a shamanic figure is, of course, compatible with Bourgeois' narrative of the restorative power

[31] Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius* (London: The Women's Press, 1989).
[32] Reproduced in Meyer-Thoss, *Louise Bourgeois* (Zürich: Ammann Verlag 1992) and elsewhere.

of her work for her, whereby cutting, pouring and making she finds peace; a level, balance and psychic reparation. More than this, Bourgeois' narratives flirt with the fetish as an object of power although this is largely denied in criticism and by Bourgeois, for amongst other things, fetish invokes the 'primitive' and thereby Robert's role. In recent years, Bourgeois has become more strident in her rejection of the primitive but in her interview with Colette Roberts (C.R.) from 1968 her response is quite different. Roberts' questions lead Bourgeois to naming a place and moment of discovering primitive art and also to its affect on her work. As we have discussed (chapter one), Bourgeois hammered nails into *Portrait of CY* and it is clear that Bourgeois interprets the emotional force of the act not only as personal release but as, in some way, leaving a residue or as residing in the sculpture, giving it its affective 'emotional tenor':

> C.R. I see. I was wondering about this – because after all your husband is interested in primitive art and this interest has always been very well expressed in his books as well as later on as director of a museum – but before that did you have many exchanges on the level of primitive art? I mean did you feel that at some point you got more exposed to primitive art forms [p.8] and symbols of totemic aspect through your association with him? Or did this come from an even earlier contact?
>
> L.B. No. I discovered primitive art at the Brooklyn museum which had a very early collection. And what I discovered there is that you could express anything you – any emotions you wanted. And I made a portrait of a very close friend of mine that I had a fight with by putting nails in this portrait. And this was a form of release which came to mean everything to me.
>
> C.R. So you mean that the voodoo cult almost of putting pins into people they disliked took on with you not only an artistic – well, volume quality – but also an emotional one?
> L.B. Yes. And the emotional tenor of the work has remained to this day.
>
> C.R. I see. So do you feel that there is a sort of passage from emotion to the unknown of religion and magic that becomes a release for the artist?
>
> L.B. Yes. I still feel this very much.

In the writings on Bourgeois, Caryn Faure-Walker's contribution to the *MoMA Papers* is unusual in being prepared to tackle the issue of fetish head on. Beyond these two rare examples, Bourgeois' work is frequently characterised in ways that suggest its arcane or even animate power as Deborah Wye illustrates; 'The result [of Bourgeois' work] whether four inches long or forty feet long, is sculpture with an inner force resembling magnetic powers.'[33] Wye is far from alone in making these kinds of statements and framing Bourgeois' work in this way.

There is then a pattern of presenting Bourgeois as a shamanic figure whose works retain a residue of her emotional force. In Crone and Graf Schaesberg's words, Louise Bourgeois *surrenders her selfhood* in *Articulated Lair*, and her gift exacts its price upon her mental health: for instance, Robert Storr says in 1994:

> There is a text at the top of 'Precious Liquids' which says that "Art is a Guarantee of Sanity" and in Louise's case this is no joke. Louise has always lived on a very thin edge and she's maintained herself by art and at the same time by having access to a kind of consciousness, has shown us things that even very few artists, even those who profess to show us the unconscious have shown us.

[33] Wye (1982) p. 14.

My interest in *Articulated Lair* is more specific than this prevalent but unspoken flirt with the fetish because, in this image, Bourgeois steps into a photographic space and uses her self as sculpture.

An earlier image of Bourgeois is far less well known. Inside the cover of the Robert Miller Gallery catalogue, *Bourgeois Truth* from 1982, is an unnamed photograph (plate 64) taken in the cobble-floored basement of Bourgeois' home. I am forced to guess that this little figure, hidden beneath latex costume and wig, is Louise Bourgeois because the photograph lacks any title, key or gloss in the catalogue and to my knowledge is not reproduced elsewhere. It remains silent. Bourgeois has been photographed against this wall at another time. In a very poor photograph from 1974 (plate 65), she leans back and smiles, showing the cobble floor itself as an installation. In *Bourgeois Truth*, the image seems to sit above the page. The extant and damaged colour print was re-photographed in order to obtain a high quality negative for publication and a decision was made to leave the edges of the print on display, offset by a blue background. So the photo sits, as if loose, as if a tangible object lying upon the page, or a real photograph, caught between the leaves. Undated, although a calculated guess would be 1975-8 when Bourgeois was making her latex mounds into costumes that culminated in the *A Fashion Show of Body Parts* within *Confrontation*, this image remains ambiguous. Is Bourgeois going one-step further than the well-known image of her outside her house wearing one of her latex costumes in 1975? (Plate 66) In this latter image, Bourgeois is wearing a fluffy beret and a fake fur coat peeks from beneath her costume. There is a boy hanging on the railings, it all looks impromptu, a little cheeky, but a little embarrassed too. Not so, the cellar photograph. The unknown figure is hidden. If it is Bourgeois, as we suspect, then she has reduced herself to an excess of hair and blistered latex mounds. The costume itself recalls Diana of Ephesus but this facelessness moves yet closer to the kinds of substitution and synecdoche upon which Bourgeois' sculptures rely, where a pole, a sphere, a skein of wool, indicate an individual. Yet here, this reduction from her to hair (the king to the crown) is enacted upon the body, it is done to a person. This is not the kind of dressing up of *A Banquet/A fashion Show of Body Parts*, Bourgeois' 1978 performance where the audience knew the identity of one of the participants whilst another intoned a scripted recitation: walking and singing in a parodic catwalk narrative of improper love. This cellar photograph is rather an elision: seeming to compress Bourgeois' methodology of making onto the condition of a real body in space. I closed the last chapter by claiming that *The Destruction of the Father* marked a transitional moment in being Bourgeois' first fully fledged scenario–sculpture, creating the myth of the unmediated encounter with the work through the force of its accompanying psychological narrative. If that is the case then this photograph is another kind of thing altogether, another first perhaps – a subsumption of the body into sculpture and the body as sculpture.

In this photograph from *Bourgeois Truth* we see, made solid, the skeins of wool that raced across Bourgeois' early drawings, twisting curling masses that themselves recalled Bourgeois' long hair. Bourgeois has kept her hair long since her art school years and the forties and fifties; in those cracked black and white photographs, she wears the front sections, looped up on her head in time-consuming, curling rolls (see plate 67). Bourgeois spent time brushing, rolling and

arranging her hair with practised neatness and precision. In her early studio photographs, her hair is utterly dominating as it falls down her back (plates 68 and 69). Her hair was a source of pride and no doubt also made for another kind of meditative, repetitive activity.[34] Bourgeois' very early drawings show spherical face-figures whose hair may also be wings (plate 70) as shown by *Laughing Monster* also called *Seasons Greetings* (1946): images whose airy flights belie the weight of hair, its drag, and in one example, *Untitled* (1943) hair surrounds an eclosion of children (plate 71). *Untitled* (1943) recalls the mediaeval Madonnas depicted sheltering citizens and guilds within her cloak with the devotees scaled as children to the Madonna's size, for instance, the *Virgin and Child with Kneeling Men of the Guild of the Misericordia*.[35] It is an art historical reference that lends further figural allusion to the fecund lumps of latex that Bourgeois wore in 1975. Through her substitutive strategy, hair and bulbous, round faces substitute for whole figures in Bourgeois' earlier prints. In the cellar photograph from *Bourgeois Truth*, they have become hair and breasts: hair and deeply allusive protrusions. Chronologically, in between these two uses of hair are the skein drawings where the coils and lengths dissipate into hairs, lines, fibres and grasses, making landscape textures and seascape rhythms as in *Untitled* (1955, plate 72) and *Untitled* (1950, plate 73). If, in the photograph from *Bourgeois Truth*, we see the complexity of a real body reduced taking upon itself the signs and symbols of Bourgeois' art, then in her drawings and prints we see curls and tresses twisting and brushing through her work, just as threads of wool of Bourgeois' childhood have become woven into her many fabulous narratives. If self-portraiture is a part of Bourgeois' profoundly modernist understanding of sculpture (the modernist encounter I described in chapter one), then the richness and persistency of these fibrous hair/wool threads attest to a sense of self that is phenomenal, time bound and caught up in weight, tangles and rhythms of caring for and living with such long tresses.

Made at this moment in the mid 1970s when we have seen Bourgeois' work at its most abstract (*Wedges*) and at its most bodily (*The Destruction of the Father* and *A Fashion Show of Body Parts*), the photograph from *Bourgeois Truth* seems to make sense of Bourgeois' later positions, such as her stepping into *Articulated Lair* to perform dramatically. More than this, the cellar photograph presents a woman-sculpture whose face and identity are substituted by symbolic fibre and latex fecundity and a woman sculptor whose sculptural hair overlays her own. Bourgeois' body becomes incorporated into the strategies of her practice: not only does she wear her latex costumes but she undergoes the sculptural and symbolic substitution that is a device in her production: she becomes the totemic, columnar presence of her forms.

A set of materials and surfaces is starting to emerge: held in tension in a manner equivalent to both Bourgeois' environmental, assembled sculptures and the ambiguous relationships she establishes between objects and their narratives. A well known example where this operates is Robert Mapplethorpe's portrait of Bourgeois holding *Fillette* from 1982 (plate 74). This image has been extenisevly considered elsewhere, most importantly by Nixon in *Pretty as a Picture, Louise Bourgeois' Fillette* whose analysis notes the relationships of parts across the picture

[34] Bourgeois is certainly conscious of the allusive quality of her hair: 'Hair is a symbol of power. It represents beauty. It's a gift you're born with.' Bourgeois in Meyer-Thoss (1992) p. 178.

beginning with the coincidence of the raised veins on Bourgeois' hand and the raised seam on *Fillette*.[36] Nixon writes that Bourgeois has inscribed herself, together with *Fillette*, as related parts in a picture.[37] Nixon goes on to consider this connection between Bourgeois and *Fillette* as dramatising Bourgeois' psychic conditions of production: 'the object is made for psychic use' and also considers the images that were taken in the shoot but not used as showing a play with both maternal desire and with the oscillating identity of *Fillette* from baby to doll. Rosalind Krauss has also considered this photograph, dwelling upon the Kleinian logic of the part-object read through Deleuze and Guattari's desiring machines.[38]

Nixon considers this image as 'all parts' and I would like to briefly extend this approach: in the light of the 1975 latex costume photograph where Bourgeois also wore her fake fur coat, did Bourgeois bring two props? Her much retold narrative here is that she was nervous and took *Fillette* for support (retold variously, for instance, 'I knew that I would get comfort from holding and rocking the piece. Actually my work is more me than my physical presence').[39] The fibrous, faux animal of her coat offsets the rubbery skin of her giant latex coated penis to make two materials that sit in tension to her own long, swept back hair and her line riven face. Bourgeois in this shoot presents faux hair and faux skin, against her own dyed hair and her own wrinkling skin.[40] Mapplethorpe's portrait is a photograph remarkable not only for its attitude, about which so much as been written, but also for its surfaceness: its equation of the imitative flesh and the live, the false and the real hair and the consequent transformations that take place. Whilst *Fillette* and fur seem more animal, Bourgeois' skin and hair gain the texture of objects.

Emerging from these photographs is an incorporation of Bourgeois' physical materiality into her sculptural strategies of symbolism and substitution. These strategies of substitution and of the interchange between body and sculpture, word and sculpture, (photographic) object and sculpture, lie outside the dominant discourse of Bourgeois and her practice that, as we have seen in the introduction, is largely psycho biographical. It seems that Bourgeois' sculptural practice is ever widening to incorporate yet more material into itself as found objects, even as far as the maker herself, and this begins to undermine the separation of artist and work. Whilst we are unable to resolve the historical question of Bourgeois' relationship to feminism this is, in part, *because of* her clear tactics of evasion, ambivalence and of manipulating and pressuring the social encounter with her interviewers. The last of these is highlighted by Bourgeois' interview with Colette Roberts (1968). It is in three parts the last of which is a series of

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[35] Bartolomeo Piu (1445-50) Victoria and Albert Museum.
[36] Mignon Nixon, 'Pretty as a Picture, Louise Bourgeois' *Fillette*' *Parkett* (no. 27, 1991).
[37] Ibid., p. 49.
[38] Rosalind Krauss, 'Portrait of the Artists as *Fillette*', Peter Weiermair (Ed.) *Louise Bourgeois* (Frankfurt: Edition Stemmle, 1995).
[39] Speech to the Macdowell Colony (1990) Bourgeois (1998) p. 198. At the level of interpersonal strategies, Bourgeois' choice of *Fillette* would undoubtedly have been interesting, if not challenging, piece to choose to take to meet as controversial figure as Mapplethorpe.
[40] A photograph taken in 1979 to commemorate Bourgeois' Honor Award for lifetime achievement outside the White House shows her with light grey, or blond, hair. It is the same fake fur coat that Bourgeois wears in one of her most recent publicity photographs, that taken by Michèle Mattei in 2000 and used in the catalogue for Frances Morris, *Stitches in Time* (London: August Projects / Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2003).

questions on paper, sent to Bourgeois to answer. With no *body* with which to interact Bourgeois fails to engage with the material and simply dismisses many of the questions out of hand, ridiculing them – questions which are detailed, interested and clearly arose out of the two preceding conversations. These tactics sustain what might be called a state of radical ambiguity.[41] The strategies of substitution evident in her self images represent another set of strategies: of substitution and equivalence of material, that seems to question quite what is the maker and what is the made. The next section will try to think through this shifting ambiguity and symbolic substitution: as meaningful strategic, interventions.

Theoretical Objects

In *Narrative Inside Out: Louise Bourgeois' Spider as Theoretical Object*, Mieke Bal says, "I also invoke Louise Bourgeois as a cultural philosopher and art critic who offers a theoretical position on the role of narrative in the discourse of art".[42] This invocation also premises her book *Louise Bourgeois' Spider* where she writes: 'a theoretically strong work of art (one that proposes its own theory) has something to contribute to the way we look at art – at this particular piece, at others "like it", at art in general.'[43] Bal's Theoretical Object, akin to Stoichita's 'meta-painting',[44] participates in the meta-discourse, projecting beyond itself, into aesthetic and philosophical debate. Theoretical Objects, 'deploy their own artistic and, here, visual, medium to offer and articulate thought about art', further, 'the term theoretical object is better suited to foregrounding both the theoretical thought and the visual articulation of that thought in visual objects.'[45] Bal's Theoretical Object overturns the common practice of using theoretical concepts to interpret art objects by claiming that these works and the strategies of their maker contribute to the philosophical and cultural domain and that this is an intentional participation rather than a (possibly) incidental effect. Bal's emphasis remains firmly tied to artworks: a theoretical object may affect one's approach to other artworks through altering our wider conceptual framework and she positions Bourgeois within her own theoretical structure, demonstrating how Bourgeois' sculpture, through its ambivalent relationship with narrative, engages with her own theoretical position. *Spider* is not the only object of Bourgeois' that Bal invokes in this context, citing objects as far back as the early 1960s. In fact, Bal's analysis, though stemming from the objects, is a consideration of her own processes, indeed strategies, of experiencing art. The further Bal's ideas move the more it reads as another appropriation.

Bourgeois' work does seem peculiarly amenable to theoretical appropriation; writers see a correlate in it to their own project. Whilst this might be an accusation levelled at any text, I am interested in a closer dialogue with the work itself and with Bourgeois' active processes of making work and making a career work. I am then keen not to 'use' Bourgeois' work to illustrate

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[41] This might be usefully compared with the tactics of Equivocation Denis Hollier identifies in the writings of the Collège de Sociologie. See Hollier, 'On Equivocation (Between Literature and Politics)' *October* 55 (winter, 1990) 3-22.
[42] Mieke Bal, 'Narrative inside Out: Louise Bourgeois' Spider as Theoretical Object', *Oxford Art Journal* (vol. 22, no. 2, 1999) 101-26, p. 101.
[43] Mieke Bal, *Louise Bourgeois' Spider* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001) p. xiv.
[44] Victor Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
[45] Mieke Bal (1999) p.104.

a psychobiographical, post-Lacanian or post-structuralist argument. Given this desire to stay close to the work, Bourgeois' radically ambiguous position – evidenced through her interview strategies of declarative islands in a shifting sea of reinterpretation supported by interpersonal manipulations, sculptural methods of symbolic substitution and the equivalence of all kinds of material – forms an ever-shifting terrain that suggests theoretical consequences, or at least problematizes already existent theoretical positions. The strategies we have seen in play here undermine the psychobiographical position through Bourgeois' reviving and apposite redefining of her quotes and phrases and her substitutive, sculptural and photographic practices where she becomes blurred with her objects. Yet, these works which blend fibre and hair are embedded within a practice for which the artist's expression of self is fundamental and so cannot be allied to the subject-as-fallacy structures of post-structuralism and deconstruction. I have argued that Bourgeois' sculptural strategies evolved through her reaction to and engagement with Modernism in New York in the 1940s, strategies linked to that milieu and that adapt to and reinvigorate as the historical moment changes. Hence, these images lead to questioning the *kind* of self Bourgeois is implicating. As with Bourgeois' words, the images of Bourgeois exist within a circle of possibility, refusing closure, and function within and without what we perceive as the object of study: the art objects. This manifold presence will lend an ambiguity and openness to any discernings of theoretical position we achieve.

Beginning to ask what may be the theoretical consequences of the strategies we have seen at play here is no simple matter. If we have considered it complacent to forget the specificity and use (commercial, positional or sculptural) of Bourgeois' words then, similarly, it is too simplistic to consider the artwork as one might a philosophical or theoretical proposition. The proposition depends upon a linear construction, as premise meets evidence and counter argument to end in conclusion. This is in no way comparable to the structure one finds in sculpture, where temporality replaces linearity, where one must circle a thing rather than follow a thread, and where one is presented (especially in the case of Bourgeois) with simultaneous multiplicity rather than singular sequence. One's experience of art is precisely that; an experience – whilst one must understand a proposition logically, to evaluate its validity. Yet, despite these fundamental differences (and discounting the historical elements of the stated intentions of the maker, their theoretical literacy and so forth) Bal's notion seems very familiar, as if far from departing from art historical norms she is simply putting into words a thriving, if implicit, practice. I am then citing Bal in order to make a precedent for my own theoretical reflections but these reflections do not in any way follow the direction of Bal's own work. Instead they stay much closer to the engagement with the sculptures themselves.

Theoretical Subjects

Henry Michaux (whose fiction, incidentally, Bourgeois greatly admired when asked in 1968) wrote that it was the art that one made – something that would never be apparent simply from looking at one's face – that was of primary importance in the construction of one's identity.[46] In contrast, Gorovoy described Bourgeois' work thus in an interview in 1994, 'The whole body of

[46] Henri Michaux, *Untitled Passages* (New York and London: The Drawing Center NY / Merrell

work to me is like a self portrait' a classic summation of the psychobiographical position.[47] Michaux's comment undermines this rather simplistic assessment by insisting that the art is *forming*, not portraying, identity. Further, by implying that the face is not the window on to the soul, Michaux seems to project an identity that is not bound by the limits of the body but bound by one's objects, one's products. If any subject position can be said to emerge from Bourgeois' objects, interviews and self-images then it leads in the direction of Michaux's assertion. Bourgeois' incorporation of her body into her work, as evidenced in these photographs, would seem to support Michaux's assessment of his own visual practice: that Bourgeois is in some way constructed and completed in each of these instances alongside the visual statement she is producing. Beyond this, Michaux's comment necessitates a system where the construction of identity is ongoing, it is not formed in childhood, or tied up within an essence or core substance, but happening all the time. Bourgeois' circles, which in the last chapter were physical circles paced as a strategy to access her work, here become circles of substitution: for instance; drawing hair-bodied figures, drawing her own hair in her prints, sculpting tresses that signify personhood in her silent cellar photograph or hairing herself when she sits for a portrait. Bourgeois' temporal circles of returning to her motifs, forms, titles and subjects, form a pattern of returning and remaking that has become her dominant mode of operation in recent years. These temporal circles are figured by Michaux's conception into a transforming repetition.

Feminist philosophy (as much as one can discuss such diverse and fractured positions as a concerted effort) has been engaged in a critique of the models of subjectivity presented in classical western philosophy and in recent French thought. This work is motivated by the negativity of the female subject position as projected by post-structuralism and deconstruction which, in varying ways, position woman beyond the text, outside our capacity for thought or as 'other' to a masculinist subject. These critiques and the new formulations they entail often appear to be frustrating tasks. The homogenising effect of the theoretical statement, requiring a set of fundamental properties, leads to charges of essentialism – still a dread fear despite the excellent work done in this regard by Fuss, Battersby et al – and new formulations further risk effacing some of the specific and marginalised subject positions that precisely require thought and acknowledgement within a feminist agenda. I am wary of such a contested area but Battersby's *The Phenomenal Woman* is to my mind the most sympathetic version of the critique of subjectivity, epitomising this trend and a style of thinking that draws upon numerous models, from Kierkegaard to Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze. Battersby's system maintains a notion of subjectivity whilst refusing to reify it and so neither falls into a Derridean negativism nor supports a classical post-Kantian reified selfhood. Battersby's work is particularly suitable to Bourgeois' work because of its phenomenological bent: a fascination with surface and the time based nature of subjectivity which parallels Bourgeois' claims to Existentialism and reminds us of her reading of Sartre. Battersby's model may help us to draw out the theoretical implications of interdependence between maker and work, circular movements, processes of substitution and synecdoche (hair), embodiment and forming, or becoming, through ones work. *The*

Publishing Ltd., 2000).

[47] Jerry Gorovoy to Nigel Finch (dir.), *Arena: Louise Bourgeois* (London: Arena Films, 1993).

Phenomenal Woman[48] proposes a new metaphysics of identity. It is a serious text evaluating en route the formations of subjectivity contained in the work significant post-modern and post-structural theorists, as well as the arguments of contemporary feminist philosophy. I shall give a short account of Battersby's system.

Battersby's aim is to reposition self-identity, all human self-identity, as predicated not upon a (supposedly gender neutral) male norm which places the subjective experience of women as abnormal, but instead to predicate identity upon a female norm. Thus Battersby departs from feminist moves to describe an alternative feminine subject-position by talking about everyone, not just women. To ensure the universality of her argument Battersby makes this move: that all persons have been born and exist or grew in relations of dependence, (childhood, weaning, parenting) and these dependencies suggest we should consider identity not as a (Kantian) autonomous 'I', but in terms of interdependence and non-autonomy. We all share being born, we all share dependence: including all those for whom maternity presents a barrier in theorising 'female'. Battersby abandons 'feminine', sticking consistently to 'female' in order emphasize the physicality of her position and to make birthing integral to thinking identity itself.[49] Battersby delineates her project thus:

> The identities of individual women are scored by a variety of forces and disciplinary structures. Not all of these scorings relate to issues of sexual difference. Race, nation, religion, education, family-background, neighbourhood, class wealth, all contribute to configuring and patterning the individualised self that persists through time. My analysis does not, therefore, start with the 'inner' experience of feminine modes of consciousness or of 'feminine' subjectivity. It is not another contribution to the ongoing debates about feminist epistemology, 'ways' of knowing' or problems about epistemological (or ethical) 'objectivity'... Instead I am interested in models of identity for the 'object' – and, in particular, for a body that is capable of generating a new body from within its own flesh.[50]

Battersby queries the subject-object and space-time relationships established by Kant's 'transcendental' structure, and argues against the Aristotelian notion of substance Kant retains that posits a permanent underlying substrate that persists beneath matter and bears qualities and attributes. Instead, she rereads Kierkegaard in the light of more recent philosophy, notably Deleuze, to think of identity as constituted in relationships of inequality and dependence, and through habitual repetition. Identity is predicated as fluid, and consisting of multiple aspects or 'others within' the self through whose eyes we might experience the world at any given moment. It is not that identity has no continuity and that any notion of self is illusory (pace Derrida et al). Nor does the multiplicity of 'others within' lead to a formulation such as the pack of wolves metaphor of Deleuze which, whilst fluid, does not comprise an organic unity: each wolf-self may benefit in the pack but it has its own agency. Instead, Battersby takes birth as a model: two selves that are neither one nor others. At birth two selves emerge and the process which brings this about is a time bound change through relations of dependency and not rejection or abjection as with psychologising accounts. Obviously, 'others within' incorporates internalisation of world views and ethics received from significant others. Battersby argues

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[48] Christine Battersby, *The Phenomenal Woman* (Cambridge: Polity Press / Blackwell Publishers, 1998).
[49] Battersby (1998) p. 4, this develops into a specific quarrel with Judith Butler whose conviction of the social basis of sexual difference is well known; see *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter*.
[50] Ibid., p. 6.

against the notion of the autonomous self. Taking Deleuze's nomad as an example, she makes the point that the nomad is not neutral and universal. Instead, it is a romantic vision of the young unattached male (able to roam freely spatially and sexually) and it is distinct from not only the real nomadic patterns of native Americans but also specifically excludes women, children, the elderly and the disabled; for those who care and are cared for cannot roam freely, they are not autonomous.

Against a counter charge of essentialism, Battersby positions her system not in terms of an Aristotelian model of essence as a permanent or pre-given 'thing' or 'substance', that undergoes metamorphosis but that nevertheless remains unaltered. Subject-position, for Battersby is better thought of in terms of Wittgenstein's game theory, which describes a family of related items. Just as there is no single aspect that all games share to qualify for the category 'game', so it is with subject-position and 'essence disappears into a set of interrelated resemblances, bound together in terms of rule based activities that are intersubjective (language games) or that constitute a unity over time (forms of life).'[51] Therefore, we can use female or woman as a category without ignoring difference and specificity.

The key to Battersby's system is repetition, taken from Kierkegaard, which can be seen to 'score' (as music) or inscribe (engrave) what we might call tendencies of personality into the materiality of the brain through repetition, habitual process and events. Thus, she hopes to account for both childhood events and present and future ones. She describes a fluid, ever forming, self of 'others within' not only accounts for literal personality splits but also the not-conscious ethics and attitudes that we perceive as stable parts of our identity but which emerge at certain moments or change profoundly as circumstances change and as the matter of the body changes. The self is not Kantian immaterial 'substance' that remains permanent through change; it is more like an event that is born; it is 'a workshop of possibilities'. The subject then is of *becoming* not of being, and this Kierkegaardian location demands a reconceived notion of time. Battersby quotes Kierkegaard:

> Repetition is a crucial expression for what recollection was to the Greeks. Just as they taught that all knowing is recollecting, modern philosophy will teach that all life is a repetition. The only modern philosopher who has an intimation of this was Leibniz. Repetition and recollection are the same movement, except in opposite directions, for what is recollected has been, is repeated backwards, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forwards.[52]

Kierkegaard asks for a mode of time which would proceed via echo and repetition and which is non-linear. Hence in *Repetition*, Kierkegaard's Constantin Constantius returns to Berlin hoping to find repetition. What he finds is disappointing difference but finding repetition of the same is not possible. Indeed, for Battersby, repetition does not lead to sameness: 'sameness' is constructed by seeing the present in terms of a not-yet-actual ideal. Repetition on the other hand, brings into existence an order of events and a becoming of the subject that was already potentially there in the past. The 'now' is constituted by the relation between the multiplicity of possible paths that emerge out of the past and the multiplicity of possible directions that stretch

[51] Ibid., p. 33.
[52] Battersby (1998) p. 172.

out outwards the future. This temporal revision still seems to depend upon a linear relationship between past, present and future, simply replacing a single line with infinite possible ones (pasts and futures), at whose intersection is now. However, I think it is important to remember its function: to extend multiple possibilities backwards, undoing what we normally perceive as the fixed nature of the past and suggesting that in remembering we find or make a possible past. We rework the past through the nexus of aspects in becoming that is our subject-position now. It is a malleability of the past also that is true to Kierkegaard's own writing. Many of his characters lived in oppressive and obsessive relationships with their past (see his *Antigone*) and the past remains open to new meaning and remains able to affect the moral lives of his characters.[53]

Battersby's work may well prove most accessible and useful to other thinkers at the metaphorical level. She notably replaces substance with the idea of wind. Wind is both identifiable but also in constant change, it is both formed by what it passes; made thin through an alley or lifted over a hill and yet has shaping power bending trees and forming waves. There are obvious flaws to a metaphorical figure that is so insubstantial when Battersby is keen to promote an embodied subject, whose embodied experience is crucial to a phenomenal living in the world. At the same time, wind at least begins to substantiate a subject that is in constant change: becoming. Wind has some benefits over the related metaphor of Deleuze: desiring machines, whose couplings and movements of 'flow' are it's only delineating points.[54] More down to earth is Battersby's mention of the media: the modern consumer parallels the fluid subject. As consumers our desires are moulded by the media, the 'self' is not entirely free but neither is it without a specificity that can develop into a form of resistance to modes of domination that do not fit with its own singularity. More useful still is Battersby's use of sound. If life without repetition is noise, then a repeat becomes a riff: one note is sound, whereas two become music. This emergence of a musical refrain from undifferentiated noise seems to make sense not only of the repeat and bringing novelty rather than sameness, but also of the active searching for significance and active intentional processes of the becoming, rolling, forming nature of the subjectivity she proposes.

There is a clear parallel between Battersby's contingent and dependent subject to whom autonomy is a stranger and for whom becoming is a process of flux, and the strategies visible in images of Bourgeois as she leans on her work, clutches her objects for support and completes their spaces. More than this, these photographs in particular and Bourgeois' work as a whole, are characterised by their ability to hold in play a state of tension between unity and polyvalence. Bourgeois' objects, and particularly her *Cells*, form a structure where evocative

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[53] Commentators and translators point out Kierkegaard's own relationship with his domineering father and how his relationship to certain unknown biographical events caused him to make life changing decisions. Kierkegaard lived out an obsessive relationship with his own past.

[54] It is easy to forget how Deleuze and Guattari position their work in between the political and the psychological: so that the body without organs is a further dismemberment in the processes of capitalist evolution. The body without organs is a reaction to the Marxist alienated man *dismembered* by his relationships to the processes of industrial production that Marx hopes will become integrated in a utopian vision when his body and labour are his own. Instead, Deleuze and Guattari propose that new modes of machinic desire will reconstitute the public/private divide, just as the privatized body is itself a product of capitalized modes of organization.

fragmented elements are juxtaposed to create a state of tension between unity and multiplicity. Objects, materials and motifs cross reference previous work, well known motifs and Bourgeois' biography; the assemblage of familiar and unfamiliar echoing beyond and gating against the attendant narratives of each *Cell*. If Bourgeois' work is to be considered as self portraiture then it may only be theorisable in terms of a fluid self such as the one Battersby proposes. Such a reading suggests that Bourgeois' interventions both form and are formed by a kind of ever-changing organic nexus that fixes a present certainty from the possible meanings of the past *now*, with an intentional future in mind through the pathways of habitual, patterned repetition.

It would be disingenuous not to mention here that Bourgeois has herself lauded Kierkegaard, although which texts she has read is not clear. She may simply sympathise with his burden: his unknown family secret and his overbearing father.[55] The biographical link does not undermine this theoretical relationship. For having read Kierkegaard's work Bourgeois may (or may not) have engaged with his ideas in the studio and in terms of her own conception of selfhood. We should also note the parallel between the phenomenal, embodied, fluid subject whose surfaces remain unstable (in states of incorporation, differentiation and dependency) that Battersby outlines and the Existentialism of Sartre, which, as we saw in chapter one, was a formative part of the idea of practice, as committed self-creating action, that formed the shared approach of the New York School artists. To return to Michaux's observation that it was the art that one made that was of primary importance in the construction of ones' identity. We might say that not only is the art object the evidence of a fluid, becoming self – just as a photograph evidences just one brief moment in an ongoing narrative – but that simultaneously, the activity of making an art object, can itself score or inscribe patterns to the self.

Sartre's message is that subjectivity is evidenced in one's actions because the surface is reality. Therefore, one literally makes oneself through one's choices; through one's projects. Bourgeois' sculptural strategies can then be seen as making herself *visible* to herself through intuitive decision making. Suggested by Rosenberg who voiced Existentialism's emergence in art so eloquently, this is a process aiming towards 'future self-recognition':

> A painting that is an act is inseparable from the biography of the artist. The painting itself is a 'moment' in the adulterated mixture of his life – whether 'moment' means the actual minutes taken up with spotting the canvas or the entire duration of a lucid drama conducted in sign language. The act-painting is of the same metaphysical substance as the artist's existence. The new painting has broken down every distinction between art and life.[56]

Rosenberg typifies the painting as a moment of the artist's life and it is here where the phenomenal and existential frame of Battersby's work is revealed. Underlying her notion of the nexus fixing a past and a present with future intentions in mind is precisely this kind of empowering of the moment as a formative event. It is in the existential notion of a radical, self-creating intuitive autobiography *act*, that the complex slippage between Bourgeois' art and life in the monograph form can be resolved. The life is contained within and formed by the art. In Battersby's terms, Bourgeois' is autobiographical mode in the extreme: Bourgeois literally

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[55] Unpublished interview with John Jones, 1966.
[56] Harold Rosenberg, 'American Action Painting' *Art News* (51: December 1952) p. 22, extract reprinted

fabricating and substantiating her history and her choices, her children, her parents, her brother, her fears and her fights, through her drawing, printing, carving, assemblage, in steel and in stone. Seen in this way, as quintessentially engaged art, Bourgeois' practice seems to be less one of therapy than of self-creation.

Battersby's updated reworking of this process permits us to see how the fluid self may operate in gender terms to describe Bourgeois' shifting position, her ambivalence, her *in-between*, because it permits subject position to change and to be discovered anew with each moment of making. The impalpable quality of this relationship between a fluid subject and a tangible object does have a more 'common-sense' correlate. For in larger terms, the making of an object is an event to which one works towards (both in genesis and fulfilment), but it is also, very obviously, a self-defining activity. Bourgeois' move from painter to sculptor is clearly a shift that altered her sense of self. The finer degrees of movement, as each new piece both expresses one's conviction – an ethical act in Sartrean terms – and shapes one's present, future and past in the theorising of a fluid self can then be imagined. Each sculpture, is a movement inscribing potentiality into actuality, and scores both the maker and the work: in the photographs object and maker meet and intersect in a moment of becoming. Simultaneously, a moment of becoming sculpture and becoming sculptor is frozen into a silent totemic figure. And this is all there is. There is no 'life' behind the work.

Such fluidity seems true to Bourgeois' assembled spaces. In the *Cells*, subject and emphasis change with each version, and yet continuity is maintained by repeated materials, motifs or relationships. We might argue that a similarly Wittgenstinian family grouping is applicable here. They do not all contain the same features. Their most similar aspect, their containment, is not the same across the series. Some we can enter, some are closed, some roofed, some not. *The Red Rooms* (1994) for instance are spirals and *Passage Dangereux* (1997: the über cell) consists of a central corridor with spaces like chapels coming off it on each side. Further, Bourgeois' substitutions, as in the images discussed here, represent tangible intersections between the embodied self and sculptural material, where hair and fibre, skin and latex can be transposed or made definite: challenging the boundaries of the body as an independent and definite unit. The kind of phenomenal, fluid subject that is written so clearly in work like Battersby's sees no sharp cut between self and other. The subject does not require abjection or introjection; a self is a complex grouping of singularities, so that otherness is within not simply without and, rather existentially, the object marks a moment of temporary stability which will disperse.

Considering Bourgeois' work in terms of a fluid subject rather than a psychobiographical subject predicated upon Aristotelian essence, can account for the range of Bourgeois' work and the disappearance and recurrence over time of her motifs. It does not require a core subject or purpose, and permits a rolling flow between the forces of change and repetition that are so evident in Bourgeois' practice when seen historically. Nor does a fluid subject position preclude a psychoanalytical approach or Bourgeois' own, rather over-determined, Freudian and Kleinian interpretations of her own work. For, these may be seen to be a part of the pressures and

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in Harrison and Wood (1992) pp. 581-4.

forces that shape the emergent self at any moment or event. Psychoanalysis, by drawing attention to certain kinds of pressures upon selfhood and certain kinds of reviving and revisiting of pasts and, similarly, Bourgeois' psychologizing hindsight, may be seen to be creating a particular psychoanalytical past in that moment of remembering. Finally, Bourgeois' circular motion in her making and remaking seems to draw out the notion of repetition in Battersby. For repetition in Bourgeois' work produces novelty and simultaneously pursues a relationship with her past that is made more intense with each repeat.

No Trespassing

Let us look again at the matter of this chapter, Bourgeois' self-images and her interviews, with a notion of a phenomenal, fluid, contingent subject in mind: testing it against the work. The idea, of the simultaneous emergence of maker as fleeting subject and art as temporal object within the space of making, calls to mind another image where symbolic substitution is taking place. The cover of *Louise Bourgeois* (1995) is a photograph of Louise Bourgeois holding a sign over her face (plate 75).[57] The sign reads *No Trespassing* and the image is a still taken by Nigel Finch during the making of the 1994 Arena film.[58] Bourgeois' body sits in the space of her sculpture, her head is intersected by an object and again she depends upon an objet trouvé to master the moment of the photograph being taken. As the cover for a catalogue called *Louise Bourgeois* this image, rather than closing off Bourgeois by interrupting our questioning gaze, functions to do precisely the opposite. As a book cover, this image invites us to open up and possibly trespass beyond the sign, or at least puzzle over its rebus: simultaneously a refusing gesture and a publicity image. Whilst we look to the face, traditionally seen as the window to the soul, Bourgeois' gesture indicates that we are not welcome here. It is a disagreeable humour but also an indication of a more complex process. As with many of the other images discussed in this chapter, Bourgeois substitutes sign and substance for self and psyche. It is primarily a sculptural gesture: an object trouvé slogan, juxtaposed against her physical presence in another instance of body/sculpture and text/object amalgam.

Finch captured another of Bourgeois' very particular acts while filming in 1994, an act that may well be repetition in Battersby's sense. In the shot, Bourgeois holds up a small round mirror to the camera and says 'talk for yourself'. We see the camera reflected, signifying our own subject position and our refused gaze. Bourgeois repeats the same gesture of blocking the sight by placing something rhetorically significant before sight. In both cases objects speak sculpturally and succinctly, to refuse us not only within the moment of making the film – we repeatedly see Bourgeois trying to regain the upper hand she lost by not being able to contract editorial control before filming began – but beyond this, refusing the linear trajectory of the psychobiographical. Instead of Bourgeois' face, we are presented with the objects of her sculptural strategies, the much used mirror and the aphoristic slogan. Another version of this gesture appears in a studio

[57] Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, *Louise Bourgeois* (Paris: Éditions de la Tempête, 1995).
[58] The film shows a slightly different version of the gesture, with Bourgeois standing side on to the camera and only her upper portions are visible, the gesture in the film is her final word on the dispute over contractual terms, that opens the documentary. Except that it is not her final word; she returns to this dispute again and again.

photograph for *Louise Bourgeois: Works in Marble*.[59] Here she poses holding a mirror to her work, as if using it to see with as she files (detail, plate 76). In each instance Bourgeois is revisiting motifs from her work; the mirror and the aphoristic slogan were both firmly entrenched in her practice by the time of filming. At the same time, by performing with the object, Bourgeois makes a sculpture of her body through the simple substitution of body part for object. *Femme Maison*, woman-house, is now revisited as woman-sign and femme-miroir.

At the level of the monograph, there is a continued determination to see Bourgeois' work as self-portrait and this continues to be one of the primary directions of art writing generally. Self-expression *is* fundamental to Bourgeois' understanding of her own practice. I argue that Bourgeois' intersections and substitutions between body and work in these photographs and in her circular returns to her motifs can be seen as expressing a fluid, becoming, and embodied subject-position. If the monographs are to be true to Bourgeois' processes, her impish and capricious manner with the press and the rolling, shifting terrain of her work, then they would do well to consider the relationship between Bourgeois' art and life not as psychobiography but in terms of a radically autobiographical process. That is forming, the past and the maker 'Louise Bourgeois' in making the work. Bourgeois presents a self and a body in these mirror and sign substitutions that is within the scope of her practice: a sculptural practice that seems more and more akin to Battersby's workshop of possibilities. A sculptural practice where elements of self and sculpture may be fabricated and where sculpture and body are mutually implicated in a rolling motion of becoming and of the momentary stability of the present.

By continuing to complicate the self of the portrait image in her installations and photographs, then Bourgeois may be offering a theoretical position in her work in Mieke Bal's terms. Bourgeois presents an embodied self, not only in her well known imagery of birth, breasts and bodies but, as argued here, in a very tangible intervention into sculptural space developing a categorical confusion between the body and the work, the maker and the statue. It may well prove that the kind of fluid subject that Battersby proposes cannot be accommodated to Bourgeois' practice. I am not trying to assert that Bourgeois is in any way trying to practice this theory. Rather, I am trying to discern the kind of subject position that Bourgeois' complex practice points towards. Battersby's text, and the phenomenal and existential ideas upon which it relies, is the closest conception of subject-position I have found, thus far, to the one I see emerging from Bourgeois' photographs and objects.

To return to the interview with Dalsimer with which we began: given that it is not possible to establish a clear position for Bourgeois regarding her relationship with the feminist arts movement then a revised conception of subject position along the lines Battersby suggests can at least help to posit *why* Bourgeois is so hard to pin down. For Battersby's system supports the impossibility of fixing, of pinning down. A fluid self requires flux, and a repeated re-*writing* of one's past in the light of one's present. Bourgeois' ambivalence about the feminist movement is itself compatible with a fluid, emergent subject position because, for Battersby, human relationships depend upon vertical relationships of power, such as mother and child

[59] Unterdörfer (2002).

relationships where power is necessarily unequal. Horizontal relationships of equality and sisterhood as promoted by 1970s feminism are, for Battersby, a fiction:

> Indeed, for some feminists it will be shocking when I assert that I see no possibility of personal relationships in which power plays no part. Sisters of friends, lovers or colleagues might find a temporary equilibrium as unequal forces or powers balance out. But neither friendship nor love demands equality, or selves abstracted from the force-fields of power.[60]

Again, this position has an affinity with Sartre. In both systems, sisterhood in the sense of togetherness and unity with common purpose – as Dalsimer is hoping to trace – are possible only fleetingly, if at all, when ephemeral becomings and fluctuating power relationships happen to balance. Bourgeois' memories of rivalry, selfishness and ambition, if looked at in this light, are powerful not because of Bourgeois' apparent cynicism but in the disappointment Bourgeois feels when purported ideals were not made manifest: she did not find support in her 'minority', only the competitive atmosphere to push herself harder. Yet at the same time, Bourgeois makes it clear that her own friendships with the attendees at her dinner were fleeting and one of the criteria for their continuation was the success or failure of their work.

One of the most crucial implications of Battersby's revisionist metaphysics is the existential act that characterises Battersby's momentary emerging of a temporarily fixed subject. Bourgeois is historicising herself as she looks back from 1986, and in terms of a fluid and contingent subject, by reckoning with the past – with a present and future in mind – she is in a sense *making* it. In Kierkegaardian terms, she is crystallising one past, a past of rivalry and ambition from possible pasts. In existential terms, making is an act that inscribes a self in substance – literally making oneself visible. However formulated, there is no outside to the present moment and the substance of the work. There is no truthful and authoritative past to compare to. The past (a past), and ones relationship with it, is forged in making the work. This is not to suggest in any way that Bourgeois is consciously being untruthful. Rather that memory for a fluid subject coincides with contemporary clinical research on the malleability of memory (see introduction), that suggests we are mistaken in considering memory as something we unearth, something that finds us and is pure and uncorrupted but instead recognises that memory is something we interpolate and reconstruct in the light of the present moment.[61] For a fluid subject, remembering crystallises a past, repetition of remembering both scores into the personality an

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[60] Battersby (1998) pp. 205-6. Although Juliet Mitchell presents a strong case for the psychoanalytic importance of sibling relationships in *Siblings* (2003), Battersby's restricts her emphasis upon vertical relationships largely to the realms of power. Her point is to formulate a philosophy that is inclusive of other disciplines and positions and that would be compatible with both the child development theories descended from Freud and positions such as Mitchell's.

[61] J.A. Meacham's work on memory has considered this speculative, reappraisal of the past that Battersby thinks philosophically. He notes that memory studies have long been aware of how subjects distort their reconstructions in the light of present needs, motives and circumstances. He writes, quoting Reiff and Sheerer (1959):

> Each time, the event is placed into a differently structured personal frame of reference of an evergrowing autobiography, which in turn affects the respective remembering in a different way. A girl who married at twenty may at thirty remember chiefly the dress she wore at her wedding; at forty, the food consumed at the wedding breakfast; at fifty, the fact that her uncle sent a stingy present.

Reiff and Sheerer, in Meacham, 'Reminiscing as a Process of Social Construction' *The Art and Science of Reminiscing*, Haight and Webster Eds, (Washington: Taylor and Francis, 1995) p. 39.

increasing relationship with the past but also *continues to transform that past.* There is more than an echo of Kierkegaard's obsessive relationship with his past in the increasingly memory orientated narratives and pieces Bourgeois has produced since the 1980s. it is as if a circular relationship of revisiting and re-remembering the past is in play; one that brings certain strands of her practice into closer focus, and one that more and more tightly redefines Bourgeois in terms of her relationship to this past. I shall look at this in chapter four.

I would not want to and do not think it is possible to make a definite statement about Bourgeois' subject position in regard to her relationship to feminism. To do such a thing would be to undermine the efforts I have been making to maintain the contingency of Bourgeois' unpublished interview, the active strategies evident there and the sculptural possibilities of her self-images. It would force closure upon Bourgeois' strategy of radical ambiguity, one pursued in her interactions with interviewers as well as in her treatment of her own image in photography. If one wanted to pursue an argument for Bourgeois' inherent 'feminism', as a quality that persisted before and beyond the historical moments of the 1970s feminist arts movement then I think it would be this: that whilst formulating a sculptural lexicon that treads a line of both acceptability and being 'cutting edge', Bourgeois has repeatedly and insistently made images of women and women's experience. This seems to be abundantly clear if looking at her female drawings from the 1940s If, as I suggest in my introduction, *Fallen Woman* is a return to Giacometti's *Disagreeable Object*, then it is a sculpture which makes-woman Giacometti's genderless blind face. Another example might be *She Fox* (1985), which alongside *Nature Study* (1984) were based on a found decorative sculpture of a hound to which, Robert Storr tells us, Bourgeois added numerous large, breasts: again *making* it female.[62]

There is though another route through this territory: to trace Bourgeois shifting positions. For instance, we might consider how Bourgeois has managed her career as the self-positioning billiard game Baxandall proposes. This would entail detailed examination of Bourgeois' interactions with interviewers like Dalsimer and interrogate the positioning of herself 'in-between' feminism and the mainstream of 'masculinist' movements (and firmly 'in-between' other categories too) so that she is available for appropriation as the tides of opinion change. Bourgeois exhibited with women's groups and also participated in exhibitions where she might be the only woman, for instance the show *Sculpture* at Knoedler and Co. (January 1970), where Bourgeois showed alongside Moore, Duchamp-Villon, Laurens, Tony Smith and others).

On a micro-level we might consider Bourgeois specific works. For instance, although Bourgeois has occasionally orchestrated performances etc... these are far from the controversial actions of, for example, Ono's *Cut Piece* or many of Schneeman's performances. Instead, Bourgeois' conviction of the importance of the object, and in later years its permanence, have informed her sculptural lexicon bringing to it an apparent safety and conservatism that is consistent with both her generation and those interests that we have been discussing as modernist, hegemonic and male-centred mainstream. We might consider how certain works challenge the viewer. I suggest that whilst confrontational to the viewer, demanding our personal and psychic

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[62] Robert Storr, 'A Sketch for a Portrait' in Robert Storr, Paolo Herkenhoff and Allan Schwartzman Eds. *Louise Bourgeois* (London: Phaidon, 2003) p. 77.

engagement, certain of Bourgeois' best known works, though they deliberately play with the viewer's discomfort are simultaneously reassuring. An example here might be *Precious Liquids* (1992) whose narrative of sexual awakening is powerful, emotive and even frightening (particularly as Bourgeois narrates it in the 1994 Arena film) but the sculpture itself is more allusive. For the vials that she states contain the liquids of the body, the pus, the spit, the tears and sweat, do so only metaphorically. It is a dry installation: we do not come up against leaky female flesh, we do not have to wash our hands, we do not smell any *body* (nor do we see the male whose coat is his substitute, a presence hanging on one wall). The kinds of interiors and fleshy spaces that Mona Hatoum filmed in *Corps Etranger* (1994) Bourgeois has left to our imagination in a deeply theatrical, film-noire, sculptural equivalent of a turned out light, or the famous three full stops '...' .[63]

Whilst it is certainly true that at this point in her career, when she spoke to Dalsimer, as much as if not more than any other, Bourgeois was at the cutting edge of a trend in which sculpture and installation were tackling more personal and bodily questions. Yet, Bourgeois remained *in* the line of the avant-garde *with* the male artists, such as Robert Gober with whom she was paired for *Parkett*'s special issue. Even a work as apparently controversial and threatening as *Fillette*, Bourgeois makes safe by her cradling of it, cuddling it in the Mapplethorpe photograph. If it was a vivid hanging of the flesh in 1967, then by the time of her retrospective in 1982, she wants it to be a little girl. The 1999 cast is accurately subtitled *Sweeter Version* and its latex thickness obscures the fleshiness of the original and the unnerving departure from latex stem to plaster tip. Bourgeois, we might discover traverses a line, strategically and carefully, where she is able to articulate the body, her body and women's bodies in a sculptural language that is not *too* threatening to clients and the institutions of the art world: communities populated mainly by men. This in itself may reveal an interesting, ambivalent, fluid, subject position, one based upon female experience but literate in a sculptural language that is open to other positions, other norms.

My aim has not been to 'fit' Bourgeois' work to the theoretical system of Battersby or one of the other versions of this kind of philosophy that attempts to come to terms with the demands of feminism and the problems set by post-structuralist, psychoanalytic and deconstructive theory. There are alternative ontologies of the subject, for instance, that of Alain Badiou has excited considerable interest recently. In his system we also *become* subjects but in totally different way. For Badiou, subjects are born in the realisation that they are encountering an event, an 'event' of probably life changing significance, an 'event' that changes our 'situation'. Badiou's use of the event and one's choice at such a moment also seems to owe a debt to Sartre's brand of Existentialism but, as yet, his philosophy of the subject is not fully theorised or translated.[64]

Rather, my purpose here has been to draw out Bourgeois' strategies: visual tactics of substitution that force an equivalence of material, whether word, image or body, leading to a slippage between work and 'context', and rhetorical and interpersonal strategies that permit

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[63] Mona Hatoum, *Corps Etranger* (305 x 350 cm, video installation: 1994) stills reproduced in Michael Archer et al, *Mona Hatoum* (London: Phaidon, 1997).

[64] Fans of continental philosophy await the upcoming publication of *Logiques du Mondes*!

continued shifting of her position whilst using apparently declarative statements. These strategies point to a position of radical ambiguity and a self-positioning 'in-between' the parameters of the time. Recurring is a characteristic circular movement, as Bourgeois returns to and repeats her symbolic substitutions and returns to and revisits aphorism and statements. These circles are purposeful Kierkegaardian repeats, looking forwards by looking backwards. Philosophies of subject, as evidenced by Battersby are perhaps now approaching the kinds of existential contingent proposition that underlies the practice of Bourgeois and her New York School colleagues: an art of committed action and self-formation. I hope to have illustrated the theoretical implications of Bourgeois' strategies of self-imaging and self-positioning for our understanding of subjectivity and identity. It is a journey that has traced an ever evolving process of incorporation of material into a practice that is auto-biographical in its most radical sense: writing and making the life it proposes.

4 Vanishing Memory: reflecting upon the present and the past

> The distant past, when I was acting my solo version of Hamlet before the blind eyes of my father, duelling with myself and drinking my own poisoned chalice or, further back, when I was starting an English education, with huge balloons of boxing gloves lashed to the end of white, matchstick arms, grunting, stifled with the sour smell of hot plimsolls which is, to me, always the smell of fear, seems as clear as yesterday. What are lost in the mists of vanishing memory are the events of ten years ago.[1]

Louise Bourgeois' recent exhibition at IMMA Dublin[2] was called *Stitches in Time* by curator, Frances Morris. It is a title which succinctly evokes the vividness of the distant past that is Bourgeois' subject in recent years. The loop Morris makes in her explanatory thread is astute curatorship, bringing to the fore the circular motions of Bourgeois' practice and referencing the new upsurge of sewn objects emerging from Bourgeois' studio. At the same time it also circles around the unspoken issues of ageing which John Mortimer's vanishing memory so lucidly describes: the fading of the present and the presence of the past. Leading on from the changing and fluid relationship to past(s) which I outlined in the last chapter, I would like to address what is not said by *Stitches in Time* and consider how Mortimer's awareness of the mists of his own vanishing memory might help us rethink Bourgeois' work, in these years which bring together great success and great old age. I shall refer mainly to two exhibitions, Bourgeois' three towers *I Do, I Undo, I Redo* made as a part of her commission for the Unilever Series that opened the Tate Modern gallery in 2000 (also curated by Frances Morris) and the more recent IMMA exhibition which I saw when it visited Edinburgh. In considering Bourgeois' installation for the Tate Modern in 2000 I shall concentrate upon the idea of a sculpture that Bourgeois has never seen and the art market which enabled this to occur. *Stitches in Time* leads me to consider more closely how age is an important, but unacknowledged factor in the realisation of Bourgeois' recent work.

A Symbol of the Tate Modern

> GOD, the size of it. Whatever the Tate Modern may be, it is more than just a gallery. It is an event.[3]

So wrote Tom Lubbock in May 2000. His emotive writing has the vivid fervour of sports commentary: the capitalisation and succinct oral phrasing rhetorically captures the awesome scale of the turbine hall with a force and brevity that echoes, 'Jesus wept.'[4] It is hard not to underestimate the massivity of the turbine hall, an interior so high and wide and vast that the press who reviewed the museum's opening could only compare it to the nave of a cathedral.

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[1] John Mortimer quoted in Alan J. Parkin, *Memory: Phenomena, Experiment and Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993) p. 173.
[2] November 2003 to February 2004 moving to the Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh March 2004.
[3] Tom Lubbock, 'Art Zone', *The Independent* (May 9, 2000) p. 13.
[4] 'The Raising of Lazarus' (John, 11:35) *The Holy Bible*, Douay version (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1956).

Looking down upon the turbine hall are floor after floor of exhibition space which, though more human in scale, can take several hours to circuit. However, in May 2000, it was not only the scale of the Tate which was the 'event', but its opening. The *Art Newspaper*, totting up the statistics, noted that 1800 journalists reported upon the Tate's opening and over 105,000 visitors poured into the turbine hall during the first three days alone.[5] The opening ceremony and party were televised and those artists who are also celebrities performed for the camera. As a part of the opening publicity round, Francis Morris, in one of the countless interviews she did in May 2000, stated that Louise Bourgeois is "a symbol of the Tate Modern".[6] It is this relationship between new museum and inaugural exhibitor that concerns me. For I believe that this exhibition reflects upon the cultural milieu in which it took place and I hope to sketch out an elaboration of what Bourgeois being a 'symbol' of the Tate Modern might mean.

We might usefully begin with the writings that trace this event: the press cuttings. For, as commercial beasts, the journalists seem very sensitive to the complex of meanings wrapped up in Tate Modern. For instance, Lubbock continues his article by stating that the Tate is a 'contemporary pleasure complex, a total shopping-scoffing-strolling environment', that he concludes is a trip that resembles more a theatre outing than a gallery visit.[7] It is a full day with 'grub and treats': one cannot pop-in to look at a couple of things. Hence, for Lubbock, the art which is presented at Tate Modern is not an avant-garde of radical conflict against the society in which it emerges, but an art acquiescing to its relationship to an all pervading commercial culture of leisure and diversion. There is certainly something in this. Art and commerce sit together in the Tate Modern in unusual contentment; after perusing the galleries, we can buy limited editions from a few, select, contemporary artists in the shop. Further, the Tate, with the opening of this new museum presents itself as a new brand: *Tate*. From magazine, to paper coffee cup, the institution presents a financial astuteness that recalls its sugar trading history.

Alongside this clear commercial edge, the thematic hang contributes to the sense of a leisurely day out which Lubbock describes. Several journalists summed up the hang as a triumph of curatorship, and noted the relentless intensity which, for example, placed a Monet water lilies painting over Richard Long's stones and Marlene Dumas's watercolours against Matisse's studies of backs. In 1996 Nicholas Serota said that a contemporary museum of modern art should 'generate a condition in which visitors can experience a sense of discovery in looking at particular paintings, sculptures or installations in a particular room at a particular moment, rather than finding themselves standing on the conveyor belt of history.'[8] Following this principle, the thematic hang at the Tate Modern abandoned a historical interpretation of the collection in favour of the intuitive gathering and juxtaposing of works and artists, as discovered by the curators. The consequence is an intense experience of seeing as one notes parallels or differences between works, which may well lack historical connection, and one's eyes tire of the visual overload, as they might in a supermarket, or indeed, a theme-park.

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[5] Anon. 'An Astonishing Achievement but...' *Art Newspaper.* [issue 204, 2000] 15.
[6] Jonathan Jones, 'Putting us in the Picture', *The Guardian* (February 3, 2000) http://www.guardianunlimited.co.uk/Archive.
[7] Lubbock (2000) p. 13.

In pre-opening interviews Lars Nittve claimed to be rethinking what a museum of modern art *is* at the Tate and Frances Morris was quite open about wanting to move away from what she termed the 'Alfred Barr model' of a historicist, movement orientated approach to curating.[9] So a chronological hang of 'isms' was replaced by a thematic hang, where the loose subject heading permitted the a-historical pairings and strange juxtapositions which caused so much press attention, indeed Alan Riding suggests juxtaposition is a keyword of the new hang.[10] The intensity of curating itself makes the decision to open the new galleries with Bourgeois' work interesting. Bourgeois' sorting, and symbolic assemblage, as can be seen in the choosing and placement of objects in the *Cells,* becomes placed against the sorting, placing and selecting activities of the curators.

Without question, the industrial fabrication of Bourgeois' installation, whose full title is *Toi Et Moi: I Do, I Undo, I Redo* (plate 77), also reflects the impressive engineering of the Bankside Power Station and its subsequent transformation into ambitious art space. For the Tate, Bourgeois produced three towers and one spider, her largest ever, called *Maman.* Of the production of these works, Steven Henry Madoff writes:

> From the start, huge purpose – and commensurate means – drove the show. Translated from maquettes by a structural engineer, the looming towers were realized at the Modern art Foundry, a metal works long used by Bourgeois in Astoria Queens. The giant mirrors in polished steel that top *I Do* and *I Redo* were made there as well. Seven forty-foot containers of parts were shipped across the Atlantic for assembly. Then they arrived on April 3, less than six weeks before the opening, thirty workers employed in teams of ten per tower began their dash to erect the mammoth installation. The hall in those weeks was something out of the nineteenth century, Morris recalls, with great showering sparks of arc welds, gantries fitting colossal cylinders, men shouting, the stink of fire and hot metal in the air. To save time the spiral staircases, originally to be produced in the States, were assigned to Little Hampton Welding near London and brought in by truck. Forty three tons of steel in all were rising in a race against the clock.[11]

Most importantly, Maddox continues: '"biggest ever" permeates the room, mixing Spielberg – scale with the psychological symbolism of the surreal. Here installation art gears up to theme park showmanship.'[12] Pulling no punches, Maddox's interpretation of the leisure experience acknowledges its sheer theatricality, it is theme park stuff. Although he is writing specifically about Bourgeois' work, it is hard to separate the experience of her towers from the museum as a whole. Maddox's rather theatrical experience suggests another way in which Bourgeois' inaugural exhibition might be a symbol of the Tate, as Morris claims. For the coming together of commercial acumen and visual art in the museum has lucrative corporate sponsorship as its showpiece. Art, and firstly Louise Bourgeois' art, is allying itself with corporate power in ways it has often been seen to refuse. The Unilever Commissions have a total value of £1.25m over five years. I think it is important when thinking about this work to recognize its position in the art market and in the cultural life of business in this way. What is fascinating about the Tate

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[8] Nicholas Serota, *Experience or Interpretation: The Dilemma of Museums of Modern Art* the 1996 Walter Neurath Memorial lecture (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996) p. 55.
[9] Nittve and Morris in Jones (2000).
[10] Riding, Alan. 'A Symbol of Renewal in South London -the Tate Modern, the bright star on the Thames other side' *New York Times.* (5 January, 2000) p. 3.
[11] Steven Henry Madoff, 'Towers of London', *Artforum* (vol. 38, no. 10, 2000) pp. 162-5.
[12] Ibid.

Modern is how these two interests are brought together with Bourgeois' work. In spring 2000 *Maman*, Bourgeois' largest ever spider (another theme park touch), formed the canopy for a luxury sponsors' dinner held in the turbine hall. The long banqueting table looked diminutive within the span of *Maman's* legs whilst public and private partnerships were toasted beneath the sculptured spider-belly of the grand dame of contemporary sculpture.[13] Further, if considered historically, Bourgeois' work can be seen to have grown steadily in size and expense as her market has grown. The casting into bronze of her early wooden personages, after a gap of thirty five years, her increased numbers of public commissions and her increased use of stone and bronze, all link to a steadily increasing market. Yet, the Tate commission is on a scale which goes beyond her garment factory studio into an entirely foundry based and industrially fabricated activity. The massive financial backing which Unilever placed behind Bourgeois epitomizes the position of the Tate, and the commercially implicated and leisurely idea of art that it presents, at the turn of the millennium. At the same time, this enormous wealth of the market has allowed Bourgeois to build on an incredible scale, making fantasy castles, follies, that emerge directly from her 1940s drawings of water towers as palpable presences (plates 11, 12 and 13, *He Disappeared into Complete Silence*).

We experience the Tate Modern as a nexus of art, commerce and leisure, and our experience of Bourgeois' towers and giant spider participates in this immense but leisurely stroll through culture: the towers are positioned in relation to the galleries as the maze is to the country house. At the same time, our experience of climbing and descending the towers is far more specific. Bourgeois' written explanation of *I Do, I Undo, I Redo* runs thus:

> *I Do* is an active state. It's a positive affirmation. I am in control, and I move forward toward a goal or a wish or a desire. There is no fear. In terms of a relationship, things are fine and peaceful. I am the good mother. I am generous and caring-the giver, the provider. It is the "I love you" not matter what.
>
> The *Undo* is the unravelling. The torment that things are not right and the anxiety of not knowing what to do. There can be total destruction in the attempt to find an answer; and there can be terrific violence that descends into depression. One is immobile in the wake of the fear. It is the view from the bottom of the well. In terms of a relationship to others, it's a total rejection and destruction. It is the return of the repressed. I take things away. I smash things, relations are broken. I am the bad mother. It is the disappearance of the love object. The guilt leads to deep despair and passivity. One retreats into one's lair to strategise, recover and regroup.
>
> The *Redo* means that a solution is found to the problem. It may not be the final answer, but there is an attempt to go forward. You get clearer in your thinking. You are active and have confidence again. In terms of relationships to others, the reparation and reconciliation have been achieved. Things are back to normal. There is hope and love again.[14]

I have been concerned in this thesis not to continue the pattern I have often seen of circuiting each of Bourgeois' works with her attendant narrative, but I include this statement because it is primarily a statement about intention. Bourgeois did not see this work once installed, she saw only it as maquettes. Too frail to travel, Bourgeois learnt about the Tate site from videos and photographs and the work was commissioned through a foundry and constructed in situ.[15] This

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[13] 'Heads of Tate', *Vogue* (London: CLXVI, September 2000) p. 96.
[14] Louise Bourgeois, 'I Do, I Undo, I Redo', *Tate* magazine (special issue, no. 21, 2000) p. 49.
[15] Madoff includes photographs of the construction.

statement shares with many others an attempt to delineate the psychological function of the work; in the main, Bourgeois' statements are made post facto, blending what she did, with what it did for her and hinting at what it might be for us. This statement though, is made at or before completion of a process in which Bourgeois was at one remove. Alex Potts suggests Bourgeois' stories are not so much explanations of the work as allegories of our engagement with the work and it seems to be in these terms as an intentional narrative that Bourgeois' statement functions.[16] There is also in this statement an echo of the fabulous narratives that have accompanied previous works; a similar story of destruction and reparation accompanied *She Fox*, and there is clear reference to the *Lairs,* but in the Tate statement Bourgeois moves away once more from the specifics of her biography. Unusually, this narrative is referenced to Bourgeois' maternity rather to her daughterhood which is more common, and it is phrased in the psychoanalytic terminology of good and bad mother, rather than the meaningful recollection of a specific scenario. Finally, this narrative brings together a physical journey, up and down the towers with the story telling necessity of the crisis that is resolved and the biographical journey of our protagonist, Louise Bourgeois, through depression and crisis.

As a statement of intention and of function, the narrative delineates the experience we are expected to have as we enter into and act out the script of these installations by stepping into and up *I Do, I Undo, I Redo*. It is a journey of labyrinthine transformation; it is not merely walking the country house maze but following a path into the heart of something which is a rite of passage. We may not find a minotaur, but Bourgeois' installation expects us at least to confront our mirror image. At the same time, the spectator – now participant – becomes a part of the installation: figuring it for the onlookers below and peopling her narrative. In this sense Bourgeois' incorporation of her own body into her work to complete it, discussed in chapter three in reference to *Articulated Lair*, is expanded here to include us, the spectators.

So how did it feel to ascend Bourgeois' towers? I did not find the towers a space primarily of reflection upon oneself and of psychological encounter with other climber-participants as the press release suggests, because safety regulations prevented groups ascending the towers and so prevented interpersonal confrontations. The mirrors themselves prevented self-assessment through their distorting positions and the crashing of the stainless steel door atop *I Undo* recurred throughout my journey. Whilst each viewer-participant will have had their own particular experience of the towers, my journey felt incredibly public. Rather than encountering myself, more or less profoundly through ascent, seated contemplation and descent, my encounter was instead an encounter with my fellow visitors to the Tate. Standing atop *I Do* (plate 78) was a self-conscious experience; I could see the crowds below *Maman* watching me and taking in the scale and ambition of the towers and I could feel the eyes of the viewers looking from the upper galleries down onto the mirror topped platforms and at me and my fellow symbolic spectator-participants. I am not sure I have been in many situations where, as a spectator, I have felt so conscious of being looked at. The consciousness of being watched, expected to sit and reflect, made it difficult to enjoy the panorama of the turbine hall or

[16] Alex Potts, 'Louise Bourgeois – Sculptural Confrontations', *Oxford Art Journal* (vol. 22 no. 2 November 19990 pp. 37-53.

encounter my own reflection as prompted by the numerous mirrors. Rather, I became very aware of being, for everyone else, that sketchy symbolic figure in Bourgeois' drawings of primal psychological scenes. As I moved up and down the towers, I went from being on public view to the private viewing of tiny maquette-like figurines within the latter two towers, with a relief like coming in from the cold. The public circumstances of the piece then, made this a very particular experience, for me an experience of being isolated *and* on show. If these towers were installed elsewhere, perhaps in the quiet space of the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, then how different would the lonely pausing atop the towers have been.

In *The Sculptural Imagination,* Potts suggests that Bourgeois epitomises the tendency to 'stage' contemporary sculpture creating a theatrical arena of sculpture in which the psychic aspect of the viewer's engagement is foremost.[17] Such a reading of Bourgeois' recent work is pertinent. In Bourgeois' *Cells*, Potts suggests, the viewer is caught in a one-to one encounter with the work, an encounter of resistance, a kind of existential confrontation. The viewer is staged by Bourgeois' structures and so made to enact publicly what are usually seen as interiorised experiences and provoked by the confrontation into a state of mind between anxiety and fascination. It is a staging that places both viewer and work in the same space to interact in a relation that draws in and simultaneously excludes the viewer. It is, Potts says, distinctly not about bringing together spectator and work in some union, but about creating conflict and exclusion. In Bourgeois' towers, the staging of the viewer and work that Potts identifies is even more intensified by the viewer-participant's position in relation to those other spectators in the turbine hall. Atop the towers one feels estranged and excluded from *both* the towers and one's fellow man, the tiny figures who look up from below. If, as Potts writes of viewing the Cell's, that we are never able to view the whole 'Cell':

> One always feels a little blocked and never actually finds a position where the interior is fully and comfortably laid out before one.[18]

Our restless inability to feel comfortable in the towers is exacerbated by being so clearly, on show.

It seems as if these forms epitomize the isolated presences of Bourgeois' *personages* and water tower drawings, but blown so large that in order to come to a sculptural resolution they morph into a whole other set of concerns. There are, for instance, clear differences between the towers and their models, most noticeably with the changing of the staircase from circuiting the tower in *I Undo*, to a simpler spiral stair in the final version (plates 79 and 80). Further, the small figurines of the previous towers are supplemented along the internal staircase of *I Redo* with motifs from Bourgeois' recent oeuvre: a near life size cloth Janus head and others that recall the *Cells*. In structure, *I Undo* is far more complex than *I Do* and *I Redo;* incorporating a spiral staircase which surrounds a central column, containing red glass orbs. This is the basis of the structure of *I Do*, but in *I Redo* the tower form is further encased in a looming square steel tower, to which a second spiral stair is appended. In *I Undo*, while it does include a chair and a

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[17] This chapter expands upon his paper 'Louise Bourgeois – Sculptural Confrontations' in the *Oxford Art Journal* special issue on Louise Bourgeois (vol. 22, no. 2, November, 1999) pp. 37-53.
[18] Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000) p. 369.

small mirror, it does not position the reflective scenario as the pinnacle of the ascent. Instead, the creaking and difficult door marks a moment of powerful transition between outside and inside, from the airy visibility of the Tate into a close, dark and threatening space.

Further, whilst Bourgeois' narrative approaches the moral fable, the towers contend with a real space and time in gigantic form. They are architectural constructions that are only hinted at in *Passage Dangereux* where the sculptural space is a passage one must walk through. If there is a precedent for *I Do, I Undo, I Redo*, then it is the installation of Bourgeois' work in the bell tower of St Pancras' Church, Euston (1996, plate 81). Here, one ascended a dark and narrow spiral staircase to discover crude, stuffed, life-size figures, hanging and embracing in the filthy and gloomy circular space around the bells. The Tate towers slip from the emotional narrative which preceded them into an intense and dramatic witness of the Euston installation and a *Cell*-like aggregation of motifs. This is most noticeable in *I Redo*. Here, the literality of the figurines, which describe good and bad mothering through feeding and nurture, are carried through into *I Redo* with a seated woman whose infant floats above her, linked to her belly button by an umbilical line. Added to this figure are other objects; a stuffed Janus head and marble forearm that, in their more allusive symbolism, recall the accruition and juxtaposition forms in the *Cells*.

Working models for the commission, whose images were used by the Tate for pre-opening publicity, showed a quite different picture as the maquettes differed considerably from the final version. The three towers are clearly distinguishable, plate 82 seems quite close to *I Do*, particularly since one of its mirrors is clearly held higher and further from the platform. The model shows two chairs and only one is present in the final version, something which fundamentally alters the contemplative isolation of *I Do*. Plate 83, the model of *I Redo*, shows a broad single tower, as forms the hidden core of *I Undo* (plate 84), rather than the inverted telescope of *I Redo*. It lacks a viewing platform at the top of the stairs so the spectator-participant must look out, or possibly down into the tower, from above. There is a mirror, but it is a long oval dressing mirror and sits within the base of the wide tower, facing a single traditional chair. *I Redo* has also changed significantly during the course of the commission, creating a second viewing platform, borrowing the double chair from the first maquette, and removing the mirror and chair to permit a second staircase and give a labyrinthine journey. The third tower, *I Undo*, adopts the single chair from the base of *I Redo*, placing it within the red lit interior of *I Undo*. More strikingly, an attempt is made in the model to spiral the staircase around the entire tower, which in cross-section makes a circle (cylinder) surrounded by a staircase within a square (tower) surrounded by stairs. We walk a more complex geometry in this model. In the final version of *I Redo,* a simpler, independent spiral staircase rises to one side of the black tower. Whilst trying to enact Bourgeois' verbal narrative – of an emotional journey through depression to hope – it seems as though, during the processes of idea becoming-model then becoming-sculpture, the realisation of the towers simultaneously fulfil the narrative and move away from that narrative in coming to a sculptural resolution. For, openness and enclosure, within and without, self-consciousness and confrontation with blunt symbolic objects and figures, become inherent to the sculptural experience.

It may be that *I Undo* was the last tower to be conceived, for the enclosure upon which it relies expands in looming darkness and in complexity (sculpture, cylinder, stairs, tower, stairs) upon the tighter spiralling column of *I Redo* (stairs, telescoping cylinder, stairs). It may be that my speculations simply result from my struggle to accommodate Bourgeois' narrative of self-reflection and encounter to the physicality of these towers. As Potts reminds us, one's experience of Bourgeois' work is anxious, restless and unable to contain the installation as a whole.[19] Yet, even the mirrors, the central motif of *I Do, I Undo, I Redo*, only partly function as ocular tools. In part they too are a stock motif, emerging from the *Cells*, and whose formal and symbolic qualities are, in themselves, enough. In *Cell XV (For Turner)* (2000), two circular mirrors enliven a steel mesh cell that contains other motifs: glass jars half filled with blue liquid, sheets of glass and aluminium, blown glass orbs and a large plaster form, resembling a giant double version of *Untitled* (1962), whose grooves also hold blue liquid (plate 85). *Cell XV (For Turner)* depends upon formal repetition, emphasized by the mirrors shapes and surfaces of metal, plaster circles, blues, whites, silver and steel. Bourgeois also used circular mirrors in walls and ceilings in an identical manner in *Cell (You Better Grow Up)* (1993) and *Cell (Three White Marble Spheres)* (1993) and in similar ways in other cells, for instance, *The Red Rooms* (1994) *Cell (Eyes and Mirrors)* (1989-93).

There is a deep discrepancy between the claims Bourgeois has made about this sculpture and the actual experience of participating in it – climbing the towers. Viewing '*I Do, I Undo, I Redo*' is not a personal and isolated, intellectual or emotional, response but a social, bodily, participatory activity dependent upon the specific site of installation at the Tate. Indeed, the Tate's own catalogue pictured the installation topped by a single contemplative figure whose silent passivity enacts Bourgeois' narrative and makes the towers *work*. It is impossible to consider the towers in isolation from, firstly, the conditions of viewing within the turbine hall of the Tate Modern, where the intense visual experience incorporates all of the surrounding space (including the viewing platform on the second floor) and further, the circle of commercial activity and mass entertainment which the Tate presents. We may then, see *Toi Et Moi: I Do, I Undo, I Redo* as an apotheosis of certain strands. Firstly, the incorporation of the viewer into the sculptural space, which began with Bourgeois' environmental installation at the Peridot (1949), which Bourgeois discussed with Suzi Bloch in 1976.[20] Secondly, it is a theatrical engagement with the drama of objects and audience which seems totally unconcerned with the arguments in Fried's important *Art and Objecthood* and her own early dismissals of Surrealist 'theatricality, whilst aligning with the art, commerce and pleasures of mass tourism that are presented by the Tate Modern.[21] Thirdly, it is a present, and three-dimensional, incarnation of Bourgeois' early and significant imagery.

Bourgeois' international success led to the fabrication of these follies drawn directly from her 1940s imagery, built at great expense, which allow us to wander around her lonely whimsical etchings. These towers evidence the shift from a practice developed as something totally

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[19] Ibid.
[20] Louise Bourgeois to Suzi Bloch, *Art Journal* vol. 35 (issue 41, Summer) pp. 370-3.
[21] Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood' in *Artforum* (summer 1967) extracts reprinted in Harrison and Wood, Eds. *Art in Theory 1900-1990* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

independent. She could lift and carry and make everything herself on the corner of the kitchen table. Now her work is factored on an industrial scale: a theme park embodiment of her strategies of symbolic substitutions in a way continuous with her earliest developments in the New York scene. Bourgeois' installation then, does not so much make us reflect upon ourselves, but mirrors the ambitious space and its inherent acceptance of commercialism. Also through their gigantic slippage into the craft of juxtaposition which mediates between the towers as experience and as narrative, they mirror the ethos of the new hang. As such, Bourgeois' mirror topped towers exist less within the mythical narrative of her work as reflecting her relationship to memory than as an utterly current reflection of the present moment in the art life of the country.

Potts' concludes *The Sculptural Imagination* by drawing out two facets of the staging of sculpture: the presence it posits 'as something unstable, more like an utterance than a thing'[22] and scenarios of psychic splitting rather than psychic wholeness.[23] Potts allies these turns with the fragmenting and confrontational tendencies in modern society and 'the instabilities of modern phenomena that momentarily take shape as the collective realities of the modern world.'[24] For Potts, visual art now is tied inevitably to 'the restless and directionless dynamic of binding and dispersal fundamental to the operations of now politically hegemonic capitalism.'

It is towards this nexus of the relationship between the subject position of the viewer, the allusions of sculpture and the nature of modern capitalist society which, rather less eloquently, I am positioning Bourgeois' towers and the arrival of the Tate Modern. Potts' text outlines the demise of the modernist object and points to the strategies, of staging the viewer and particularly of staging the viewer as split and broken, which contemporary sculpture has developed to speak anew. Ours is a DVD culture, where the fast-food consumerism and advertising culture has informed the structures of the 'art experience' which the new Tate presents; the solitary, modernist observer, who might have popped in to look at a couple of things is impossible to conceive in these immense galleries which blend leisure with visual intensity. For Potts there is something about the compelling quality of the encounter with certain recent sculpture which points to glimmerings of a collective reality that is not subsumed within the endless circulation of capital. For, within 'the scenarios of psychic instability and splitting, of emptiness and provocation, dramatised so vividly in recent 3D art, there can emerge modes of self-positing, or of being there, that have a sustained and sustaining presence.' It is a call of hope, for another, less tangible, collective self understanding. When Bourgeois is so aptly the symbol of the Tate Modern, her work positioned as sculpture's answer to the maze at Hampton Court Palace and the curators reflection of themselves, then I think the test of *I Do, I Undo, I Redo* is this. Can her mirror-topped, theme-park installation engage with Potts' tracing of a strand in sculpture which permits the self-positing of the viewer in way that is more sustaining and that suggests a collective reality beyond the operations of the market?

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[22] Potts (2000) p. 377, there is a parallel here with Bal's call to Austin.
[23] We might usefully compare this analysis with the effacement of the subject that Fer traces, and the subject riven by infantile drives that Nixon outlines.
[24] Potts (2000) p. 378.

Stitches in Time

Louise Bourgeois has now become housebound[25] but her ageing has rarely been discussed relation to her work, even though her age has been an ever-present trope of the discourse, given her late success. In fact ageing and art-making is one of the chestnuts of art's histories, a conceptual confusion wrapped up in the term Altersstil and the idea of 'late style' in certain masters, such as Titian or Rembrandt that romanticises later life in accounting for clear changes in style or subject.[26]

Two issues of the *Art Journal* typify the kind of work which has been done in the visual arts on art and ageing. Firstly, in 1987, the magazine published the papers of a Symposium entitled: *Old Age Style*.[27] The contributors assessed the usefulness of the notion of late style with respect to their subjects, including Leonardo and Picasso. In 1994 the *Art Journal* ran a special issue consisting mainly of interviews with elderly artists and focused on the plurality of the experience of ageing for artists.[28] As the guest editor in 1994 Robert Berlind notes, the issue arose at a time of increasing profile of older people: we might think of Bourgeois' modelling for Helmut Lang, two years later, as part of a media interest which has perhaps now been superseded.[29] Berlind notes that key works of 1970's feminism turn upon the beauty of the confrontational performers: Wilke, Schneeman and Benglis. He writes that in its fetishising of the body, experienced from without rather than from within, 'much of today's art reflects society's deep resistance to dealing with the realities of ageing', diverse realities that emerge through the interviews.[30] Since the publication of this issue, it is clear that the realities of ageing are real and present issues for artists, evidenced in activities such as Yoko Ono's decision to restage *Cut Piece* in her seventieth year.[31]

The 1987 *Art Journal* publishes papers given at a College Art Association symposium. The contributors test the long-held notion of old-age style and find it problematic and inconsistent, but paradoxically ever-available. Firstly, given that, historically, life spans were shorter, artists reaching great old age as Bourgeois has done were very few and what constitutes old age is problematic, the 'late' period of Rembrandt began at fifty-three, whilst for Picasso it was eighty-two.[32] The links to physical ageing also remain uncertain, such as how much bodily deterioration relates to changes in style and subject. Further, Martin Kemp and Julian Held note that certain artists were reputed to be able to return to earlier style at will, which suggests the late style may in fact be a contemporary updating to fit the location and current manner and nothing to do with eyesight or spirituality or the intimation of death. Beyond this, Altersstil seems to merge technical (such as palette changes or brush stroke) and iconographic aspects

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[25] Scott Lyon-Wall, *Louise Bourgeois – Drawings and Sculpture* (Köln: Kunsthaus Bregenz, 2002) p. 9.
[26] 'Altersstil' is primarily associated with Hans Tietze's work on Titian but 'late style' precedes this. See Julian S. Held, 'Commentary' in *Art Journal* (vol. 56, no. 2, Summer 1997) pp. 127-33.
[27] David Rosand (Ed.) *Art Journal* (vol. 46, no. 2, Summer 1987).
[28] Robert Berlind (Ed.) 'Art and Old Age' *Art Journal* (vol. 53, no. 1, Spring 1994).
[29] Helmut Lang campaign (Autumn/Winter 1997/8) photo by Bruce Weber.
[30] Berlind, p. 19.
[31] An excellent discussion of the political implications of this work, as oppose to its staging of potential violence, be found in Julia Bryan-Wilson 'Remembering Yoko Ono's Cut Piece' *Oxford Art Journal* (vol. 26, no 1, 2003) pp. 99-123.
[32] Held, p. 128.

(sensuality, spirituality, subject matter) in order find a way to generalize about subjectivity between artists and it seems to romanticize later life in order to explain visual changes: as the body fails, the art reaches new depths of profundity.

With the exception of a few disparaging newspaper critics, when a link is made between Bourgeois' art and her age it is in the defiant terms of her energy and determination.[33] In the light of such major projects as *I Do, I Undo, I Redo*, I would like to consider Bourgeois now, at ninety-three, and reflect upon her present and her relationship to her past(s). Ageing is an implicit part of Bourgeois' practice, visible principally in her concern with memory. I shall argue that age is a key factor in understanding her work; Bourgeois' recent work narrates the subjectivity of ageing. I want to separate this discussion from both the heroizing of subjectivity of the idea of late style as the consummation of a life long-lived and also the pejorative connotations of lateness as 'gone to seed'. Rather, I want to hold that the particular, silent slowing of ageing has the potential to be both vacant and intensely, creatively, productive as suggested by the refrain of William Butler Yeats' late poem *Long Legged Fly*:

> Our master Caesar is in the tent
> Where the maps are spread,
> His eyes fixed upon nothing,
> A hand under his head.
> *Like a long-legged fly upon the stream*
> *His mind moves upon silence.*[34]

I shall endeavour to show how Bourgeois' highly controlled presentation in the media and the monograph texts, which concentrates upon psychic narratives, obscures the less tangible shifts of (fluid) subjecthood evident in the work. Bourgeois' gradual introduction of assistants since the late 1960s has permitted her to develop a studio where the factoring of objects is done by other hands under her supervision. This has permitted questions of her age to be elided in ways that might not be possible for other kinds of artists; most notably in the histories of art, master painters. Further Bourgeois is presented as a lone artist, whose making is largely invisible.[35] It is a presentation that contrasts to that, for instance, of Caro, now eighty, who is frequently photographed directing or working alongside his assistants who are named persons not anonymous workers (plates 49 and 86).[36] Caro is shown in a directorial role. His lack of technical knowledge and his reliance upon the skills of his artist-assistants is abundantly clear, as artist and assistant Douglas Bentham noted in 1978:

> Tony is... the first sculptor I have met who works totally aesthetically. He knows what he wants, he has a sense for the materials but he is not a technician. I remember during our first day he asked me for a metal stick. I said, 'What's a metal stick?' Well, other sculptors would have asked say, for a "solid rod" or an "I-beam" or something like that, but instead with Tony, it's 'We need something rich here or something thin there,' and away we go.[37]

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[33] For instance, Brian Sewell, 'Into the Parlour of a Sad Old Bat' *Evening Standard* (November 26, 1998).
[34] William Butler Yeats, 'Long Legged Fly' reproduced in *Poem for the Day* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2001) p. 56.
[35] The images of Jerry Gorovoy with Bourgeois in her studio in the 1970s are an exception.
[36] Interestingly when he was sixty-seven Caro also installed a tower for the Tate: *The Tower of Discovery* (installed at Tate Britain: 1991).
[37] Ian Barker, *Anthony Caro: Quest for the New Sculpture* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2004) p. 230.

Interestingly, when he was sixty-seven Caro also installed a tower for the Tate: *The Tower of Discovery* (installed at Tate Britain: 1991) and a shared interest in the relationship between sculpture and architecture is common to both Caro and Bourgeois in the late 1980s and 1990s. The presentation of his making and his ageing is though quite different and wound up in the tropes of masculinity and the heroic male artist.

One of the few writers to confront the question of age in relation to Louise Bourgeois is Griselda Pollock in her article *Old Bones and Cocktail Dresses: Louise Bourgeois and the question of age.*[38] Pollock considers Bourgeois' *Untitled* (1996) (plate 87), a metal stand from whose arms fall old garments whose hangers are huge, gnarled bones. This sculpture, Pollock argues, by juxtaposing youthful and sensuous clothing with the visceral old bones recalls the otherness of our younger selves as we age and brings it brutally together with a haggard, bony self. Such a strangeness to the self of youth is not incompatible with the kind of subjectivity I have been considering in chapter three and nor is Pollock's discussion, through Mary Kelly's work, of the ephemerality of sexuality: that being a woman is only 'a brief moment in her life.'[39] Recognizing Bourgeois' fame is tied to her maturity, her becoming an elder, Pollock suggests that: 'all traces of maternal identification must be erased before culture can see the artist in the woman.'[40] Within an exhibition in 1998 replete with mature maternal imagery, *Untitled* (1996) is, for Pollock, a personal contemplation of the gap between the encoded femininity of a young woman's garments and the experience of an elderly and vulnerable body.

Pollock is quite right to notice the importance of age in Bourgeois' work and I would like to press forward her beginnings. Firstly, I want to put aside the terminology of 'late' work, which as we have seen, is an incoherent periodization of artistic production that, at its worst, can imply all that 'geriatric' does when the term is used beyond its medical context, for the hint of the pejorative may well be contributing to the unfortunate critical silence on this issue. What then, do we mean by ageing? It is a complex process that has often been compared to childhood development, but ageing is far less uniform in its pattern. It is far less definite and far harder to pin down because the complex of processes, for which it is the umbrella term, depend so much upon the life that has been lived, from nutritional, natal and work history to mental and physical stimulation.

Boo Johansson cites the work of Birren and Shroots in *Memory and Memory Measurement in Old Age*. Although I am averse to diagrams, which often oversimplify and therefore function rhetorically rather than logically, I feel this diagram finds a general level and an adequate terminology for a range of social, psychological and biological processes which occur concurrently and which describe the often intangible passing from development to ageing:

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[38] Griselda Pollock, 'Old Bones and Cocktail Dresses: Louise Bourgeois and the question of age', *Oxford Art Journal* (vol. 22, no. 2, 1999) pp. 70-100.
[39] Mary Kelly in ibid., p. 95.
[40] Ibid., p. 96.

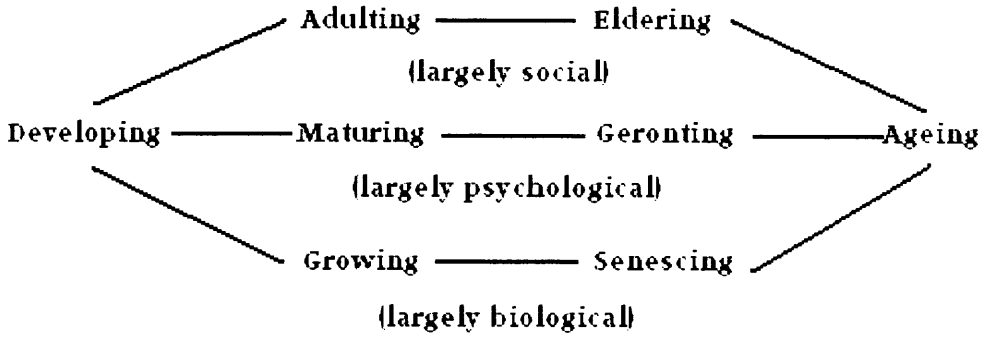

fig. 1[41]

Johansson cites definitions for these sub-processes.[42] Eldering describes the processes of social role change and behaviour in adults in a direction towards those expected and displayed by older individuals in a society (perhaps parenting to grand parenting). Geronting refers to the processes in mature organisms of adapting and optimizing self regulation and independence of environmental variations in the presence of some decreasing capacities and resources (like adapting to a slower pace). Senescing is the process which underlies the increasing probability of dying with increased age (such as the power of cell division and growth beginning to fail). As we have seen, the body is a contested territory theoretically (see chapter three) where a sense of embodiment has been important for those writing from the 'excluded' positions of feminism and cultural difference against that kind of writing, such as Deleuze's nomad, where the universal body made invisible by being presumed to be *young*, male, fully-able and free. The importance of Johansson's and Birren and Shroot's work is in simply unpacking the processes of ageing that affect each of us differently, but that are a universal reality and remind us that these changes, eldering, geronting, and senescing transcend the divisions of gender, cultural and subject perspective. Hence, Bourgeois has come to international attention as she has made the transition between 'young-old' and 'old-old' as defined by Johansson, terms which describe the period from retirement to seventy-five and over seventy-five respectively.[43]

Griselda Pollock in her brief consideration of *Untitled* (1996) is able to avoid acknowledging the complexity of ageing – how social, psychological and biological factors affect each person in a unique combination to describe how that person grows old, within their social, emotional and physical space – because of the nature of her restricted discussion of body image and body experience. This may be an advantage for the relationship between art work and a senescing body can become a reductive dialogue, such as the concentration upon Monet's failing sight in his latter years.[44] On the other hand, the body image and body experience of mourning in Pollock's article, though powerfully written, is that of a middle aged body, one perhaps Pollock's

41 Source: Birren, J.E. and Shroots, J.J.F., *Ageing, from Cell to Society: a Search for new metaphors* (1980) reproduced in Boo Johansson, *Memory and Memory Measurement in Old Age* (Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, Sweden, 1985) p. 9.

42 Johansson's source: Birren and Renner *Handbook of the Psychology of Ageing*, (New York: Van Nostrand, 1977).

43 See introduction to Johansson.

44 See, for instance, Thomas Dormandy, chapter fifteen 'The Fleeting Moment' in *Great Artists and Old Age* (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2000).

own age in which the menopause is a comparatively recent event and tinged with loss after the end of maternity. The body image Pollock finds is not one which compares to the experience of the 'old-old', in which the menopause is a part of the distant past, and whose changing character reveals new fault lines and new strangenesses like; rheumatism, hernia, arthritis, reflux, prolapse, balance problems, the changing of sight hearing, memory functions and perception of time. One's perspective of femininity, desirability and cocktail dresses is profoundly altered when reaching one's feet, or making one's bed become daily tests. By contrast, Anne Wagner observes that Bourgeois' 1960s work related closely to her body, which then was middle aged body: 'here is what it is like to have and be a body, to be holed up in a fleshy self.'[45] Relevant here is how Bourgeois parodies the cocktail dress and how humour has emerged in her later work. The melodramatic latex work that began in the 1960s has, by 1980 given way to Bourgeois permitting herself to be photographed for *Vogue* wearing her latex breast suit. Her wizened frame is a self-conscious burlesque of the Diana of Ephesus mode, within the context of a magazine devoted to youth, sexuality and beauty (plate 88).[46] Pollock's collapse of the fleshy, ambivalent reality of middle age onto the sardonic, fleshless, dry bones and vintage dresses of an 'old-old' Bourgeois speaks eloquently of the crisis that the fact of unwritten ageing presents to a generation of feminist theorists coming to terms with their own changing subject-position.

Apart from Pollock's article, there is relatively little material on Bourgeois and age which might be surprising since her practice has been most successful from her seventies onwards. Margaret Clark has suggested that the reason why so little research has been done on ageing and dying in the field of anthropology is due to negative attitudes towards the aged in America. In other words, the subject is vaguely repellent:

> My own experience with Americans (including some anthropologists is that there is among them a common view that old age, or even late maturity, is a horrible state; one shouldn't really think about it or look at it too closely – as though it were the head of Medusa. To contemplate later life is often seen as a morbid preoccupation – an unhealthy concern, somewhat akin to necrophilia. Since anthropologists are indeed creatures of their own culture, it may be that prevailing American attitudes toward aging are manifesting themselves in unconscious decision by ethnographers to ignore this aspect of the life cycle.[47]

It is not far-fetched to think that this pervading culture of a willed ignorance of ageing is also present within the discipline of art history and the operations of the art market. At the level of popular culture, for instance, we are obsessed with youth, from firming creams to facelifts and virgin singers to Viagra; if we cannot be young perhaps we can fend off being old a little longer. If it is true in publishing that nothing sells a paperback better than a young, chic author, then is it any wonder that it does not appear to be in anyone's interests to discuss Bourgeois' ailing years? Anthropology has more to tell us. Barbara Myerhoff notes that the post-Freudian bias,

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[45] Anne Wagner, 'Bourgeois Prehistory or the Ransom of Fantasies', *Oxford Art Journal* (vol. 22, no. 2, 1999) p. 23.

[46] Photo: Duane Michaels, originally published in *Vogue* (October 1980).

[47] Clark, M., 'The Anthropology of Aging, a New Era for Studies of Culture and Personality' *Gerontologist* (issue 7, 1967) pp. 55-64. Reproduced in Barbara Myerhoff, 'Aging and the Aged in Other Cultures: and Anthropological Perspective', in *The Anthropology of Health*, Ed. Eleanor Bauwens, St. Louis: The C.V. Mosby Company, 1978) p. 151-166, quote: p. 151.

which privileges early life experiences, also implies a fixing of personality and may account for this consistent refusal to acknowledge ageing.[48] Myerhoff argues that there is plenty of medical and anthropological evidence to suggest that the individual changes over time and that the adult cannot be fully understood in terms of infancy and childhood. This recognition has not been accompanied by greater attention to adulthood and old age in field studies. She writes:

> Many an anthropologist gives few thoughts to the accumulated information to be gathered from his or her own grandmother while devoting the utmost attention and solemn respect to the garbled mutterings of the feeble, gnarled "ancient ones" in some exotic place.[49]

Such places are of course gerontocratic societies, whilst ours is no such a thing. As the quote illustrates, our attitudes to the elderly are culturally invested and determined. One of the few things we do know about ageing outside medical research is that there are no givens. Unlike in infancy, where cross cultural similarities indicate that social factors interlink with biological, chemical and endocrinal processes. For instance, a mother lactating when she hears her baby is a complex response, not only common across cultures but across species (to our neighbours, the primates). Thus, to make statements about Bourgeois' capacities, and her work, in virtue of her age is no easy matter. For example, Bourgeois has in recent years been preoccupied with stitched fabric forms, often revisiting earlier works and making 'soft' versions, such as *Spiral Woman* (2003) (plate 89), which in 1984 was a small bronze. In 2003 it becomes a near life-size black fabric replica. Bourgeois' return to the look of the homemade and hand-stitched has led to the assumption of her audience, which I witnessed, that these objects are made by Bourgeois. As I walked around *Stitches in Time* in Edinburgh, the most frequent comments I heard were remarks of amazement, that at her age Bourgeois can still sew so well. While the fabrication of sculpture by assistants is an apparently ageless activity, the painter's eye may fail. Hence, the issue is not whether these objects were made by Bourgeois' trembling hands, the hands that made this large and rambling signature:

fig. 2.

A signature noticeably shakier than that which 'signed' the cover of *The Secrets of the* Cells:[50]

fig. 3.

Both signatures are shown actual size.

[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid., pp. 151-2.

The issue is rather that Bourgeois' studio, her gallery and other interested parties are happy with the impression that Bourgeois is a skilled seamstress, an image promoted in pictures such as this (plate 90) from the Serpentine Gallery catalogue of 1998. This image delineated the end of the catalogue of works and the beginning of the biography in the Serpentine volume and concisely brings together the image of the artist with her work, through her hands, stitching. Not only is Bourgeois-as-seamstress a strategy to invoke direct contact between Bourgeois and the objects in the gallery and marketplace, but more importantly, it is an image of the artist which denies the reality of her ageing.

The applause and amazement of the contemporary art audience I witnessed, at Bourgeois' sight and coordination (at her age!), obscures how her drawn line has, from the long confident burin stroke of her early prints, given way to a mass of tiny approximations that make the shapes in her recent print series *What is the Shape of This Problem?* (1999, plates 91 and 92). Indeed the length of mark making was something Bourgeois has expressed in terms of skill and pride. The transition is important. For Bourgeois' early drawings spoke less of draftsmanship than a succinct, expressive and perhaps quick shorthand and her 'skein' drawings ooze pleasure in the long (hair or thread) line. By contrast, her recent works show a hazy, fuzzy line made of a thousand brief and abrupt marks. This may be a real struggle to form a line, or it may represent a fundamental change in the purpose of the line, from being the means to form a 'pensée-plume' (thought-feather), to being a form in itself, constructed from a million mini-curves and scratchy revisions. If uncertainty characterised the task of reading early drawings like the hiding-or-trapped *Femme Maison* and the mountain-ocean-tresses of the skeins, then uncertainty seems to characterize the act of drawing now, as a slow activity that approximates the line with each stroke. If, as the instance of drawing illustrates, Bourgeois' recent work is bound up, ineluctably, with her old age then how are we to begin to speak of this?

In answer to this question, there are only beginnings. For the theoretical work needs to be done both within the field of art history and across disciplines that can acknowledge ageing as a transformative and valuable time. Griselda Pollock by maintaining that there persists an 'unchanging core identity'[51] who is in shock and mourning for the body's decline, from cocktail dresses to old-bones, holds a psychoanalytically informed dualist position which implicitly wants to hold off decline and further refuses to acknowledge that subjectivity alters in ageing, as suggested by Mortimer at the beginning of this chapter. Such changes are particularly evident in the 'old-old' of over seventy five, rather than the 'young-old'. Therefore, despite breaking new ground by raising the topic of ageing, Pollock in fact also shies away from the realities of ageing: that eldering, geronting and senescing may have significant effects upon the kind of subjectivity Pollock reads as post-menopausal mourning.

Looking at Bourgeois' 2004 exhibition *Stitches in Time* may help. The focus of Bourgeois' recent work, as we have noted, is fabric sculptures. This exhibition whilst apparently a departure, in its clear concentration upon a new material and new methods of making, in fact

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[50] Rainer Crone and Petrus Graf Schaesberg, *Louise Bourgeois – the secret of the cells* (Munich and London: Prestel Verlag, 1998).

[51] Pollock (1999) p. 97.

feels very familiar. The work dates between 1996 (*Untitled,* 1996) and 2003 (*Oedipus*, plate 93) and also includes *He Disappeared into Complete Silence* (1947). Spiral Woman is not the only motif to have been revisited in fabric. Key themes have been returned to in title, subject or both; there is a recent *Cell*, a new *Femme Couteau*, a new *Femme Maison*, a new *Arch of Hysteria*, a new series of pole works which stack 'soft' blocks and a new series of etchings and statements that mirrors the format of *He Disappeared into Complete Silence*. Thus, moving from the 1940s to the 1980s, this body of 'new work' presents the concerns of her entire career, and as Brenda McParland, senior curator at IMMA writes, this is the first comprehensive *survey* of Bourgeois' work to be seen in Dublin.[52] Bourgeois' circling back to earlier objects do, largely, shift and change the sculptural allusions of her motifs. For instance, *Femme Couteau* (2002) appears poised to harm, self-destructively, the stuffed torso from which it is held, whereas the cold, stone, woman-weapon of earlier versions could be carried and wielded against others. At the same time, such alterations have become repetition within a trope: the metaphorical power of woman-knife remains unchallenged and by repetition, it gains in (mythic) power.

Whilst fabric heads for instance *Untitled* (2002, plate 94), appear to be a new departure because Bourgeois' first cloth figures were notably headless and armless, functioning sculpturally through their gestures, their entwining and their weight. At the same time the heads seem familiar because their form is remarkably close to the kind of Picasso-esque head shape visible in Bourgeois' earliest extant drawing and printmaking, such as *Pierre* (1939, plate 95). What is new is how fabric is not engaged with in a material way, as Bourgeois has done with so much of her work: as something which has sculptural force in its own right and with which one battles in the studio. Instead, fabric is a surface solution for sculptural problems that are resolved *within* the armature: the act of stuffing which marked the crude figures shown in St Pancras' Church has now given way to simply adhering a patchwork of fabric over a moulded form, as in *Spiral Woman* (2003). Here, were it not stuck down, the knitted skin of neat triangular patches would have pulled away from the deep furrow that runs between each fat spiral. It is an attainment of surface and looks that whilst echoing Bourgeois' adoption of a mimetic smooth carving style (see chapter 3) goes beyond this earlier transition. For forms such as *Arched Figure* (1999, based on *Arch of Hysteria*, 1992-3) are largely pre-ordained, scaled up and remade in a hidden material, which is then coated with fabric, and are not discovered through making.

Both changes, in drawing and making align with our awareness of Bourgeois stepping back from active studio practice as she becomes more frail. Thus, the studio as a site of struggle is lost as she becomes able to rely upon others to discover how to translate her ideas into tangible objects. As her material engagement lessens so her ability to discover *through making* ceases, and she comes to rely more upon the intentions and forms of previous works. For Bourgeois has always raided her own archive, for instance, *Spiral Woman* of 1984 (plate 96) was not the first approach to the theme which began in 1952 with the plaster and wooden stacks discussed chapter one. The difference is that now returning and revisiting is a major function of her

[52] Brenda McParland, 'Foreword' to France Morris, *Stitches in Time* (London: IMMA Dublin / August Projects, 2003) p. 6.

practice: it seems remarkable in this exhibition how quickly Bourgeois has circuited her practice, possibly the only motif not represented in this exhibition is the 'lair'.

Further, the cell: *Cell XVI (Portrait)* (2000, plate 97) is truly a vitrine. Small and raised off the floor it cannot relate to the experience of a room in which we, or invisible protagonists, could enact Bourgeois' psychically charged scripts. Instead, as with all the work in this exhibition, there is a new smallness of scale. In the mid 1980s Bourgeois was able to undertake assemblages and juxtapositions on a newly large scale once she had acquired her garment factory studio in Brooklyn, as *No Exit* (1989), *Articulated Lair* (1986), *No Escape* (1989), and *Gathering Wool* (1990) show. These installations which preceded the complete enclosure of the *Cell* seemed to make massive Bourgeois' earlier preoccupations with assemblage and juxtaposition: placing giant spheres, mushrooms, staircases and surfaces together and apart. Further, these installations and the cells that followed necessitated peripatesis as one paced around trying to see the work all over. *Cell XVI (Portrait)* however places a cloth head within a silver soup tureen which again evokes earlier work (the evening meal scenario) whilst being on a scale which Bourgeois can handle or that can easily be brought to her to approve. The scale has then returned to the table-top and hand sized object that characterised her work of the early and mid 1960s and this aligns with Bourgeois becoming housebound.

While I am outlining the possibility, if not the certainty, of a practice where Bourgeois is commissioning and inspecting work made in her studio and brought to her window seat, this is not a critical exercise. Rather, noting these changes is the beginning of reckoning with them theoretically. These changes are in some sense a function of the combined forces of ageing and the art market. For Bourgeois to be able to control and oversee sculpture production in this way requires her successful position in the international art market, whilst the demands of the market necessitate continued, commercially viable, production. Bourgeois' motifs (of woman-house, spiral woman and so on) are very successful and this may be a part of the increased speed of return to these themes or at least of the distillation from what is produced into what is shown. Further, the fabric and objects which these works are made from, we are told, were stored away by Bourgeois for many years: scraps of ancient family tapestries, old kitchen knives and her own nightgowns. This is a tightening of the circles in which Bourgeois has paced, one in which her new tangent is a concern with describing the body in its clumsy weight and describing humanity in newly figural terms.

Visually, the use of worn-out objects – jersey, towelling and tapestry – inheres nostalgia into an object. If Bourgeois is stitching-in-time as Morris suggests, then perhaps it is here, in her juxtaposing of emotive image with vintage material. It is impossible to look at *Untitled* (2002), for instance, without recalling the nostalgic black and white images of Bourgeois' home nearly a century ago. Tapestry has become, literally, a signature material of Bourgeois' recent years, a fragment here or there symbolises authenticity, the real and tangible presence of the past and the mythic narratives of Bourgeois' work. It is as if, through the combined tactics of imagery such as; the photo of Bourgeois repairing a tapestry, the inclusion of small woven samples in framed wall-works and fabric covered sculptures, there is a concerted attempt in this exhibition to press the past, made present by nostalgic objects and old fabric, into and onto the objects.

Such a condensation depends wholly upon our knowledge of Bourgeois' narratives and fables and necessitates that we think Aubusson when we see tapestry and forces a new closeness between narrative and object.

In the next section I would like to consider how the curatorial image of the seamstress who stitches time is affected by considering Bourgeois' interviews from the perspective of age. I will then take up the issues raised here, of the change in Bourgeois' patterns of drawing and making and the constant and conservative demands of the art market, to try to begin to use ageing as a valuable term in reading and writing about Louise Bourgeois' work.

Remembering and reminiscing

The relationship to the past has now become the signature narrative of Bourgeois' work, epitomised in an exhibition such as *Stitches in Time* in which Bourgeois is figured as a seamstress of time. As we have seen, this is not a process enacted upon Bourgeois but one in which she is complicit, by for instance, continuing to foreground the use of tapestry which she began in 1997. The image of a seamstress of time is though premised upon precisely the same kind of unchanging core to subjectivity which Pollock's article also assumes. By this, I mean that underlying this image is the presumption of a *young* creative force (under 55), a Dr. Who-like time lord. I believe this to be an assumption that is problematic given Mortimer's sadness at his failing, vanishing memory, which is a testament to a changing subjectivity. Mortimer connects with the boy he once was, whilst his adulthood, his maturity, his present and his recent past all fade away. The Mortimer of his autobiography writes from a different subject position to that which he did ten years earlier. Whilst he too is stitching in time by sensing an intense presentness to his youthful anxieties, as the past folds and touches the present, he also realises that there is a loss inherent to this process, as his perception of time, and of presentness, is changing. It is something he is undergoing, not something he is lord of. What is lost to Mortimer is his near past. If Bourgeois were to be experiencing 'old-old' ageing in a similar fashion then what disappears, what is lost in the fold of changing memory is the *work*, the making of her most productive years.

Bourgeois' narratives and positions have largely become known through her interviews, which far outweigh her other uses of language, although, as we have seen in chapters two and three, there is a complex set of strategies at work, which mutually implicate her sculptural and her word-based interventions. Whilst dominating print output about Bourgeois in the 1980s and 1990s, the interview has now largely been replaced in gallery monographs on Bourgeois to thematic essays. I would like to look briefly at one of Bourgeois' most recent interviews from this perspective: of considering her age and the nature of remembering for an artist for whom memory is everything.

In this excerpt from an interview in September 2000, Bourgeois (L.B.) was interviewed by Megaklés Rogákos (M.R.) an artist and Tate employee.[53] Also present were Jerry Gorovoy (J.G.) and Paolo Herkenhoff (P.H.). Rogákos introduces his subject and perspective:

[53] Louise Bourgeois interview (18 September 2000) posted on the Tate intranet (27 October 2000) by Megaklés Rogákos.

M.R. I am giving a lecture on the 28th of September under the title *Louise Bourgeois: A Postmodern Freudian*. Of course I have read your book. I think the most important book about you is the *Writings & Interviews* (1998), the one which is published by Violette Editions. And there you make reference to Freud not necessarily in a positive sense, but also in a negative sense, I think on about four different occasions. And what I would really like to know is whether you find yourself grateful to Freud for discussing libido or for instigating this 'free' discourse around sexuality.
L.B. Repeat your sentence. Do I feel grateful?

M.R. Should artists feel grateful for any reason to Freud?

L.B. Of course!

J.G. There is an article Louise published, called "Freud's Toys" (1990), where she said that Freud did not do that much.

L.B. Psychoanalysis liberates the artist, and after psychoanalysis the artist is as creative as he was before. A lot of artists say "don't psychoanalyze because after that you will not be able to say anything". There won't be anything else to say. And I hold on to the opposite.

M.R. The opposite?

L.B. The opposite is that I am not optimistic. I am afraid to say I will never have enough time to say what I want to say.

M.R. I have already read that, and it's very important.

L.B. Absolutely, absolutely.

M.R. The reason why I say you are a 'Postmodern Freudian' is because I think you have been inspired from the whole story about symbols. And your symbols are filtered through your particular subjectivity.

L.B. You mean metaphors?

M.R. I probably mean metaphors, but I think you mention the word 'symbol' quite frequently in your interviews.

L.B. Give me an example of a symbol.

M.R. Black. The colour black symbolizes something for you. It is not necessarily death, because I don't think death interests you.

L.B. No, no.

M.R. The colours have a very great significance for you, I feel.

L.B. The colour is total optimism.

M.R. What is the significance of pink? Doesn't it relate with flesh? The pink marble!

J.G. Pink is also the feminine.

L.B. There are blue thoughts and pink thoughts.

M.R. And what about black?

L.B. Black is absence.

This presents a great contrast to Bourgeois' earlier interviews. There is an overriding sense of discontinuity, or rather a continuity that reflects carrying forward a single isolated word, such as opposite, colour, symbol or pink, rather than a concept. Bourgeois no longer parries with her interviewer although she is as cautious as ever of possible traps. Her answers are brief; she accepts Jerry Gorovoy's answers on her behalf, and by agreeing with Rogákos, or querying him, she does little of the talking. It is possible she is struggling to follow Rogákos' more involved questions, for it is after the longer questions that she asks him to clarify or rephrase. Nor does Bourgeois pick up on Rogákos' putting forth of black as a symbolic colour until he returns to it at the end of the excerpt. Jerry Gorovoy intervenes to remind Rogákos of

Bourgeois' article and also to reiterate that 'Pink is also the feminine' which is one of the many statements like Bourgeois' own 'I will never have enough time to say what I want to say', that have become fixed points, like mantras, in her mythical construction. What is interesting about Bourgeois' reiteration of fearing her time will run out is that it jars somewhat with her previous sentence on psychoanalysis: for she implies psychoanalysis leaves the artist plenty to say, which is an optimistic stance. Then, she seems to slip into her ready made phrasing about lack of optimism and time running out, which is personal and seems to leave the whole question of psychoanalysis behind in a general desire to continue her self-expression. As the interview progresses Jerry Gorovoy and also Paolo Herkenhoff step in more and more. Herkenhoff to contradict or query Rogákos' position and Gorovoy to reiterate Bourgeois' well known aphorisms and phrases.

The patterns visible here, of Bourgeois' stilted and brief answers, and Jerry Gorovoy supporting her in a way which continually repeats the aphorisms of her practice is characteristic of this interview and also of other recent interviews. A similar example can be found in Liz Jobey's *The Confessions of Louise Bourgeois.*[54] Jobey, mindful of having had to submit written questions prior to her interview, carefully transcribes certain sections including those moments when Jerry Gorovoy intercedes:

> "Louise said something yesterday when I asked her this question", Gorovoy intervened. "She said, 'In my writings I *take*, and in my drawings I *give.*"[55]

Jobey continues:

> "The other thing Louise said", added Gorovoy, "is that there is sometimes a relationship [in her work] to what she writes. But not an immediate relationship. Sometimes, it might take two or three years of maturation before there is a connection."
>
> "Yes," she [Bourgeois] nodded again. "Two or three years is just about right."[56]

Jobey shows Jerry Gorovoy reminding Bourgeois of what she has said and providing an answer that Bourgeois cannot provide that day. Jerry Gorovoy has come to speak for Bourgeois more and more and his answers, as mantras, clearly rehearse previous conversations and opinions that he knows Bourgeois will agree with. However, theirs has been a very long relationship, and from Gorovoy's own writings (such as *No Place Like Home* of 2000), there is very little distance between his stance as a writer and that of Bourgeois and her studio. As Jobey writes in her article about Bourgeois' subject being memory, her faithful reproduction of Gorovoy's repeated reminders to Bourgeois provide a subtle but pointed irony within her article, a text which may, of course, have been subject to Bourgeois' final editorial approval before publication.

Psychologists and psychiatrists, as we have seen (introduction and chapter three), acknowledge that remembering is a purposeful activity which constructs memories to serve present circumstances, rather than a machinic process that recalls pieces of recorded information and uncovers the past 'as it actually happened.'[57] As is clear in these interviews, remembering is

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[54] Liz Jobey. 'The Confessions of Louise Bourgeois', *The Guardian Weekend* (May 16, 1998).
[55] Ibid., p. 17.
[56] Ibid.
[57] An excellent summary of theories of recollection can be found in John A. Meacham 'Reminiscing as a Process of Social Construction', in Barbara K. Haight and Jeffrey D. Webster (Eds.) *The Art and Science*

also a social activity, occurring in a real situation and with someone. In the health and social care of the elderly remembering is formalised into 'reminiscence therapy', where prompting is used to help the 'old-old' to remember. Not only is Bourgeois remembering with a purpose prompted by the interview situation, but she is also being prompted repeatedly by Jerry Gorovoy, a close friend and someone who knows her stories well, in a way that doubles as a reminiscence activity. There are numerous consequences to this but what concerns me here is that Jerry is implicated as remembering *for* Bourgeois.

If Jerry's younger mind, participates in the interview with his core set of interpretations and meanings which relate to Bourgeois' work, then his increased role does not permit the continuing change and shift we have seen as Bourgeois' strategy in earlier interviews. If there is a discrepancy in the notion of a seamstress of time, then perhaps this is where it arises, as a younger subject brings his own memory-function and subjecthood to the interview. If it has seemed that Bourgeois' contributions to these interviews have been more fragmented and dissociated, then perhaps this is a continuity from the shifting position we saw Bourgeois maintain in her 1986 interview with Jennifer Dalsimer. Her aphorisms continue their role of anchoring thought, but it is harder to discern Bourgeois' shifting because of the anchoring done by Gorovoy. Further, as Jobey's article intimated (but held back from saying), problems arise with an artist whose work is premised upon her relationship to memory, but who cannot remember.

An awareness of a changing subject and a changing relationship to memory of recent and distant pasts might lead us to reconsider Bourgeois' set piece sculptures and her recent drawings. For instance, her extended series *The Insomnia Drawings*, can now be seen to be closer to her ideas of expressing her daily emotional states and closer to the truth of her ageing subjectivity, that sleep is itself a real problem, rather than only participating in the obsessive, cathartic narrative of art as daily toil and as exorcism. Mortimer suggests that while the past becomes more present, the present becomes distant, silent and unavailable; at the same time, Yeats attests to the creative power of quiet stillness. If we refuse the vaguely repellent connotation of ageing that Myerhoff observes and take this changing subjectivity seriously then it could fundamentally alter how we see Bourgeois' recent work, particularly her large installations such as the Tate towers. For these huge objects seem to call loudly, what Potts terms an inflated rhetoric, to make vivid the concerns of her earlier work that she experiences not as present concerns, present daily needs, but as remembered images, prompted through looking back over sketches and photographs of what an earlier self needed to express.[58] It is as though the sculptures are required to be a very powerful address in parallel to the utter certainty of the moment when Bourgeois utters her declarative statements. As rather blatant, even blazoned, narratives and motifs, Bourgeois' recent works call out to the viewers as distant,

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of Reminiscing (Washington: Taylor and Francis, 1995). Meacham outlines four alternative views of remembering: Firstly, thinking of memory as describing history exactly as it happened. Secondly, seeing memory as a not a record but an interpretive tool for discovering the true meaning of history. Thirdly, acknowledging that memory involves constructing meaning in a social situation and attributing it to history and finally, recognising that the situation of remembering also involves negotiating who gets to tell their story and who gets left out of history.

[58] I owe this idea to Alex Potts.

different generations, as if reaching across silence. At the same time, existentially, the increased volume of the inflated scale is a louder pronouncement and inscription of her being and existence. Rather as Yeats' *Long Legged Fly* was an affirmation of his own creative powers in his last year, confirming to himself his retention of capacity akin to Caesar or Michelangelo.

Whilst fabric and antiquated objects operate metonymically within Bourgeois' mythical narratives to be the past and make it present to us *and to her*, at the same time they also operate within Bourgeois' sculptural strategies of accruition, assemblage, selection and juxtaposition. Bourgeois' use of fabric can be read as the divesting oneself – without waste – of the trappings of a life long lived. For example, whenever I see my husband's grandmother, who is also beginning to recognize her increased frailty, she gives me things; a silver trinket box, an old vase, or a set of long stored but never used sheets. As much as Bourgeois' kitchen knives and dresses may attempt to conjure the past, they also speak of its loss in the present, of feeling encumbered by ones possessions and wanting to move on, and they further intimate *not* recognizing or *not* mourning for the days when she wore certain clothes, or cared for certain items; those were the feelings of a different, younger self.

In the next section I would like to take up the change in Bourgeois' patterns of drawing and making from a perspective of how we can positively reckon with (in Preziosi's sense) ageing within critical writing. These closing remarks are premised upon a fluid notion of subjectivity akin to that outlined in the last chapter in which the changes of ageing through senescing, geronting and eldering, are not necessarily a failing of subjectivity, and nor do they heroize a 'late' phase. These processes instead can be seen to initiate further fluid changes of subjectivity, where perhaps certain approaches to the past are not available, as awareness of the 'nook of the present' is transformed.

The Art of Ageing

The last section saw Bourgeois sitting back, letting others speak for her and previously we considered how others have been making for her. It feels like an incredibly slow disappearing act, one disguised by the continued reiteration of her presence in curation and by Bourgeois' friends and promoters. In Bourgeois' exhibition at Cheim and Read in 2002 was a sound installation *C'est Le Murmure De L'eau Qui Chante* which placed mirrors before two wooden chairs. When seated one could hear Bourgeois' voice. Frances Richard wrote about this piece: 'from the seated position, the recording, a singsong "murmur" in Bourgeois's own voice, seemed to fill the space. Quavery and light, the voice was childlike in pitch but also burnished, rough, palpably that of an elderly woman. As, a portrait of presence and disappearance, the piece is piercing yet almost giddy.'[59] Whilst one can see this as a further move towards evoking Bourgeois' presence as she herself withdraws into her private life, I propose that a more critically positive approach would be to consider Bourgeois' recent work as an art *of* ageing. Although this installation does pander to the psychobiographical desire for Bourgeois' presence, yet it is also sensitive to the static, seated, frail life that Wall-Lyon describes thus:

[59] Frances Richard, 'Louise Bourgeois: Cheim and Read', *Artforum* (vol. 40, no. 6, 2002) p. 142.

> She sits every say in the front parlor facing the window that looks out at the rectory of St. Peters Church. It is from here she watches the shift of the sun, the movement of the leaves of the tree directly outside her house, and the faces of the people walking by. She hears the noises of the street, the voices of the children in the school playground behind her town house. All sounds and images reassure her she is not alone in the world; they are her clock. This seat in front of the window is her *favourite place in the world.* It is here that she draws.[60]

As an installation, it is true to a housebound static frailty, but it is a piece executed in a medium peculiarly suitable to Bourgeois' situation. To record her voice, or film her eyes, brings creation to her and permits her to run with her thoughts as a long-legged fly.[61]

If Bourgeois' frailty is brought to the fore rather than hidden, then it is possible to see how her drawings mark time and map a subjectivity which may drift from sights and sounds to memories and the weight of the pen. A subjectivity which can be lost in reverie and for whom reverie can be lost, but also for whom the drifting silence may be a mind moving, collecting itself in creative energy as Yeats suggests. If Bourgeois' ageing is recognised, then we can see that her tiny objects, such as the new series *Oedipus*, force us once again to operate within her limits; at weights she can lift and forms she can survey in the round, however they are made. The parallel I am making here is to the walking and exploring of *No Exit* and *No Escape* which operated at the scale of a mobile and unimpeded body. Alisdair Maclean wrote:

> Our maps have improved in a kind of spurious precision as they have deteriorated in the amount of worthwhile information they convey... If the Ordinance Survey were worth the paper it prints on it would be producing a special series of maps for the over-forties, the over-fifties etc. (When you reach a hundred you end up merely with an enlarged plan of yourhouse, with the location of the lavatory clearly marked and a small arrow pointing towards the crematorium.)[62]

With light humour Maclean writes a geography of ageing, where walking and navigating are profound functions. Bourgeois' installations, while they might offer us the hope of presence, no longer invoke Bourgeois as the protagonist and the scenario as her narrative. Instead, it is we who take the stage. In 1998 Bourgeois exhibited *The Cell* in Vienna, but there were no cell walls as in previous entities in the series. Instead, *The Cell* consists of a simple circle of distorting mirrors and chairs, into which we step to encounter impossible reflections or perhaps to find the self-reflective activity of a mind moving upon silence. Are we being asked to be the one who must contribute memories, biography, and creative energy to sculpture in Bourgeois' place in a lonely space where our sight of ourselves is obscured?[63]

Bethany Ladimer writes of Colette's late novels that as Colette grew older she withdrew physically from the world because her ill-health gradually led to her being confined to her

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[60] Scott Wall-Lyon (2002) p. 9.

[61] A video *Eyes* showing a continued close up of Bourgeois' eyes was made to accompany Bourgeois' bronze installation at Williamstown College in 2000 in 2003 Bourgeois produced an invitation to n exhibition at Galerie Karstn Greve, Paris which consisted of a CD recording of her singing.

[62] Alisdair Maclean, *Night Falls on Ardnamurchan: The Twilight of a Crofting Family* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986) p. 106.

[63] *The Cell* (1998) exhibited in *Louise Bourgeois, Jenny Holzer, Helmut Lang,* (Vienna Kunsthalle: 1998).

room.[64] Forced by her body into new restricted circumstances and an ocular relationship to the world outside her window, Colette used her writing to push her characters into the sensual experiences and narrative scenarios which she had known as a younger woman and could no longer experience. A similar process might be visible in Bourgeois' work. The keynote characteristics of Bourgeois' earlier works which evoked the nuances of the figure (the intimate, leaning personages for instance), or the physicality of the body through an astute use of material (plaster of latex), has given way. More and more the visceral and physical engagement with form has given way to a wholly symbolic language and a rather didactic narrative structure in which we had better grow up, in which we had better learn to accept ourselves and in which we learn the lesson of Oedipus' self loathing. This withdrawal of the body, in Ladimer's terms, and its replacement with the vicarious experience and manipulation and instruction of other's bodies is evidenced by *I Do, I Undo, I Redo* (2000) and *The Cell* (1998). If, in the last chapter, we saw Bourgeois' strategies of substitution, intermingling her body and her work, then I argue here that our bodies' have been substituted for hers. Thus, if Bourgeois is disappearing from her works physically, then she is pushing us into her scenarios. The day-dream hum or moving upon silence of her window seat world becomes a declarative voice passing on the wisdom of her years as a series of lessons and pressing our bodies into the service of sculpture.

However, the mechanisms that surround Bourgeois and enable her to continue working are operating in a way that is premised upon defending, and eliding her disappearing presence as the protagonist of her scenarios. This emerges in interviews and in the disseminating of work that is closely tied to the idea of her voice, her touch and her possessions. It is also present in the control of Bourgeois' image which, unlike the images of Caro and his assistants, obscures the realities of a large and successful sculpture studio. Although successful in terms of the market, for it relies upon Bourgeois' long established autobiographical persona, this approach disguises Bourgeois' changing relationship to her past (or pasts); whose intensity may be disappearing as her now 'old-old' memory function continues to change. Nor do these professional structures permit Bourgeois to continue to change her relationship to those memories in terms of present needs as she has done over the years in her increasingly intense claims upon her past. This is because the prompting of her friends and assistants, as exampled by Jerry Gorovoy, repeats the aphorisms. Their shared conventional shorthand for complex ideas, which, through repetition, gain in power and authority for the audience, but in Bourgeois' interviews in 2000 seem to be losing their capacity to condense Bourgeois' ideas for her. By reiterating long established patterns of remembering and reminiscing, the prompted phrases seem to be emptying out, as if remembering the phrase were enough, so that the wonderful ocean of shifting possibilities secured by aphoristic islands which we saw in Bourgeois' interviews in the last chapter has gone.

Bourgeois' childhood narratives emerged in her seventies, with her retrospective exhibition, as she took stock of her long awaited recognition and long years of passionate making. The emergence of viewing Bourgeois' work in terms of being a relationship to her past, the narrative

[64] Bethany Ladimer, 'Colette and the Aging Woman' in *Aging and Gender in Literature: Studies in Creativity* edited by Anne M. Wyatt-Brown and Janice Rossen (Charlottesville and London: University

which has dominated the popular level of writing about Bourgeois, can be traced back to her MoMA retrospective exhibition and, to a lesser extent, the showing of the *Destruction of the Father* which preceded it, when Bourgeois was seventy-one and sixty-three respectively. Bourgeois was 'young-old' then and now she is 'old-old' and her life is quite different. What has not been done is to take this recognition of her relationship to her past one stage further and to consider it in terms of her narrating her ageing through her work to a younger and now distant generation. Now Bourgeois asks us to sit still, be quiet and listen to her humming; see the smallness of her Oedipal figurines and learn lessons from how they suffered; walk into lonely spaces and come to terms with our reflection, or our inability to see ourselves, and trace the passing of time in her blank, geometric, fuzzy doodles.

Being in one's seventies entails a powerful relationship to one's past, particularly if, as a fluid subject, one emerges in a process of continual re-evaluation of 'past'. Move into one's nineties and one's past and present are both quite different again. It may be that when we have sufficient critical tools available to deal adequately with Bourgeois' age, then this will be seen as more important to interpreting her powerful narratives, than the theoretical frames which dominate the present discourse. Bourgeois' (melo)dramatic scenarios, which staged the scenes of psychoanalysis, may prove to be canny strategies permitting her to communicate an ageing subjectivity to a younger generation. To whom she speaks more loudly and clearly. In this light, Bourgeois' increasingly tight circles, returning to her archive of motifs and themes, revisiting and repeating with increased frequency, becomes visible as a function of ageing. She has shifted from making slow sweeping circles, which made prolonged reinvestigations into her earlier ideas and themes, to the tighter turns of *Stitches in Time* where it seems as though the revisit itself, the touch, is enough. A jeweller friend of Colette's would come to her room every afternoon, bringing her fine jewels to see and touch. Colette found the daily visits and the beautiful stones a great pleasure, a tonic for her pain and for her bed-ridden isolation. In her nineties Bourgeois' loaded motifs recur as souvenirs, the recurring remembrance of jewels, rather than explorations. Simultaneously, her mark making becomes more fractured and her large scale installations describe psychic scenarios that are for *us* to activate. Mortimer's present and near past(s) fade as his distant past(s) becomes more vivid. Perhaps Bourgeois' circling her practice is her touching the jewels of her career in an attempt to reconnect, to remember, the subjectivity of her adulthood, her late middle-age, when she staged and sculpted her autobiography so intensely.

Press of Virginia, 1999) p. 242-257.

Concluding remarks

This thesis has been about strategies. By taking a range of strategies towards Bourgeois' work and by insisting upon her agency rather than her passivity, each chapter has traced samples of Bourgeois' strategies across her career and her practice and in so doing has argued for the importance of these in understanding her practice beyond the dominant discourse. In chapter one, I argued for the need to recognize the shared position of Bourgeois and her contemporaries of the New York School in the fevered tumult after World War Two. Indeed, the importance of milieu was one of the points raised by Bourgeois in 1950 her prepared question for the Artists Session at *Studio 35*. Bourgeois' practice developed in a strategic engagement with Modernism, via Picasso, and the diffusion of Surrealism and Existentialism in New York in the 1940s. Bourgeois developed making strategies that allowed her to continue to exhibit as a wife and mother, personal strategies that allowed her to progress her career in a male art world and theoretical strategies of expression, intuition and an existentially informed practice. Hence, Bourgeois' strategy might be seen as one of radical autobiography: making herself visible to herself through making her work.

In chapter two I addressed the object of study, considering how Bourgeois' statements function, how Bourgeois' works of the 1960s were made and the gap between maker, or audience, and the art object. Bourgeois' strategies of making are clear in the archive evidence of her 1960's practice, where assemblage, juxtaposition, salvage and discard can be seen to be central to an exploration of new materials and the discovery of casting, in a return to the studio predicated upon being a sole maker and not requiring workshops, craftsmen or taught skills. In chapter three I considered how Bourgeois' self-narration through her self-images and interviews operates strategically for her career and creatively as a sculptural strategy. I argue that there is a parallel between Bourgeois' substitutive activities of speech and those of her making and self-imaging. This suggests a further strategy: of incorporation into the sculptural, of words and bodies; a programme that perhaps reaches its apotheosis in Bourgeois' recent environments. Further, I suggest that there are consequences for our understanding of subjectivity that stem from her strategies of shifting, reinterpreting and reusing her aphorisms and narratives of her past that, together with her self-positioning in-between major debates and political positions and a view of Bourgeois' practice as radical autobiography, necessitate a subject that is fluid and ever emergent.

In my last chapter, I explored how Bourgeois' old-age relates to her most recent work and also the subject position I have outlined. I have described further changes in working habit, particularly in drawing and making, that contrast to Bourgeois' earlier studio activities (chapter two) and that may be an attempt to reconnect with those earlier concerns from the position of her home and her frailty. I argued that Bourgeois' strategies of substitution have continued to expand until now we, the audience, have been co-opted into the sculptural terrain as Bourgeois has withdrawn her own ageing body from the studio. In terms of the emergent subject and of an

existentially informed practice, Bourgeois' work in its dramatic differences in scale may be seen as narrating her embodied ageing and, at the same time, declaring more loudly, asserting her selfhood and presence even more strongly.

As a project, it feels like this thesis has come a long way, from *Disagreeable Objects* to *Sculptural Strategies* and in so doing has spanned the length of Bourgeois' career and traversed the various ways in which she and her work are evidenced in the archive and in publications. I argue that Bourgeois' work is peculiarly available to appropriation by theorists of different approaches and I am aware that my work is equally open to this charge. For instance, Somers' took as her beginning a comparison Bourgeois made in the 1940s between the 'genesis' of art and birth. I overlooked the comparison as a general and non-indicative metaphor for the process of the 'seeds' of an idea emerging into the fullness of objecthood. Instead, I noticed statements Bourgeois made about struggle in the studio that ring true for me. Somers overlooks the struggle Bourgeois articulates in her early years in favour of a view that supports her desire to trace the dialectic of the maternal in Bourgeois' work. As a sculptor, my concern is with objects and their making. Bourgeois has made both comparisons, though she may have repeated the narrative of struggle more often. Somers and I, despite ourselves, use Bourgeois' words to our own ends, resisting their plurality, their radical ambiguity and ambivalence in favour of a useful metaphor for our arguments: making sculpture is akin to both gestation and struggle.

This thesis offers an alternative approach to Bourgeois' work; my strategy has been through the studio and the awareness of time, of being in a particular time and of time passing. My aim has been to trace Bourgeois' strategies: strategies of making and how these change and develop over time, strategies of practice and how to make a career work by using language, photography and interpersonal tactics, and strategies of myth and how these are articulated in the media and the modus operandi of those around Bourgeois. Mine is a partial approach and it is not necessarily a better, or more sound, method but it does offer an alternative to the dominant discourse of the monographs and the related approach of psychoanalysis and I hope that, as a supplement to these approaches, this project traces new narratives and opens out the field of debate about Bourgeois' work.

I have characterised Bourgeois' work since her rise to international recognition as narrating ageing and this may well prove to be her contribution to the history of form and of sculpture that concerned her in 1968. But I would like to close by coming back to the monographs whose romantic heroizing of Bourgeois as a mythical figure I have criticized throughout this thesis for the psychobiographical direction behind it. For instance, in chapter three I mentioned Crone and Graf Schaesberg's description of the photograph of Bourgeois in *Articulated Lair* as 'a living monument, a statue of Bourgeois at over seventy'.[1] This project has come full circle on this idea of the intermingling of woman and sculpture within the environment of her work which they romanticize and which I have explored as a strategy. For I have argued for Bourgeois using strategies of radical ambiguity and autobiography in which the private person behind the work is

[1] Raine Crone and Petrus Graf Schaesberg, *Louise Bourgeois - the secret of the cells* (Munich, London, New York: Prestel, 1998) p. 11.

not available and for whom there may be infinite pasts and futures from which each repeated act of making inscribes a single independent assertion of past, present and future.

Ted Hughes wonderful translation of Ovid's metamorphoses included these stanzas at the end of *Niobe*:

> Niobe gazed at the corpses.
> All her children were dead.
> Her husband was dead.
> Her face hardened
> And whitened, as the blood left it.
> Her very hair hardened.
> Like hair carved by a chisel.
> Her open eyes became stones.
> Her whole body
> A stone.
>
> ...
>
> And yet
> This stone woman wept.
> A hurricane caught her up
> And carried her
> Into Phrygia, her homeland,
> And set her down on top of a mountain.
> And there a monument to herself,
> Niobe still weeps.
> As the weather wears at her
> Her stone shape weeps.[2]

Niobe's pain becomes stone and stone weeps. And yet such romantic visions of Niobe or Bourgeois as a statue to herself have a certain truth to the interweaving of autobiography in Bourgeois' intentionally affective practice *if* we are able to recognize that the surface is reality: that the monument writes and makes the life it proposes. Existentially, it is through one's acts and products that the self becomes visible and it is an insistence upon the primacy of the objects, the material level, that finds a parallel in Paul De Man's radical reading of autobiography the 'Rhetoric of Temporality'.[3] In this sense, Louse Bourgeois is the work, and access to the psyche of the maker is impossible because it is a myth. If Louise Bourgeois is the work then her interviews and writings cannot be evidence or documentary support, for they are also the work.

Bourgeois has not yet completed her oeuvre, she is still producing works that attest to her existence and affect the audience, so the narrative and the monument are not yet complete and perhaps nor is this project. For what may yet come?

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2 Ted Hughes, *Tales from Ovid* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997) p. 223.
[3] Paul De Man, 'Autobiography as De-Facement', *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

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